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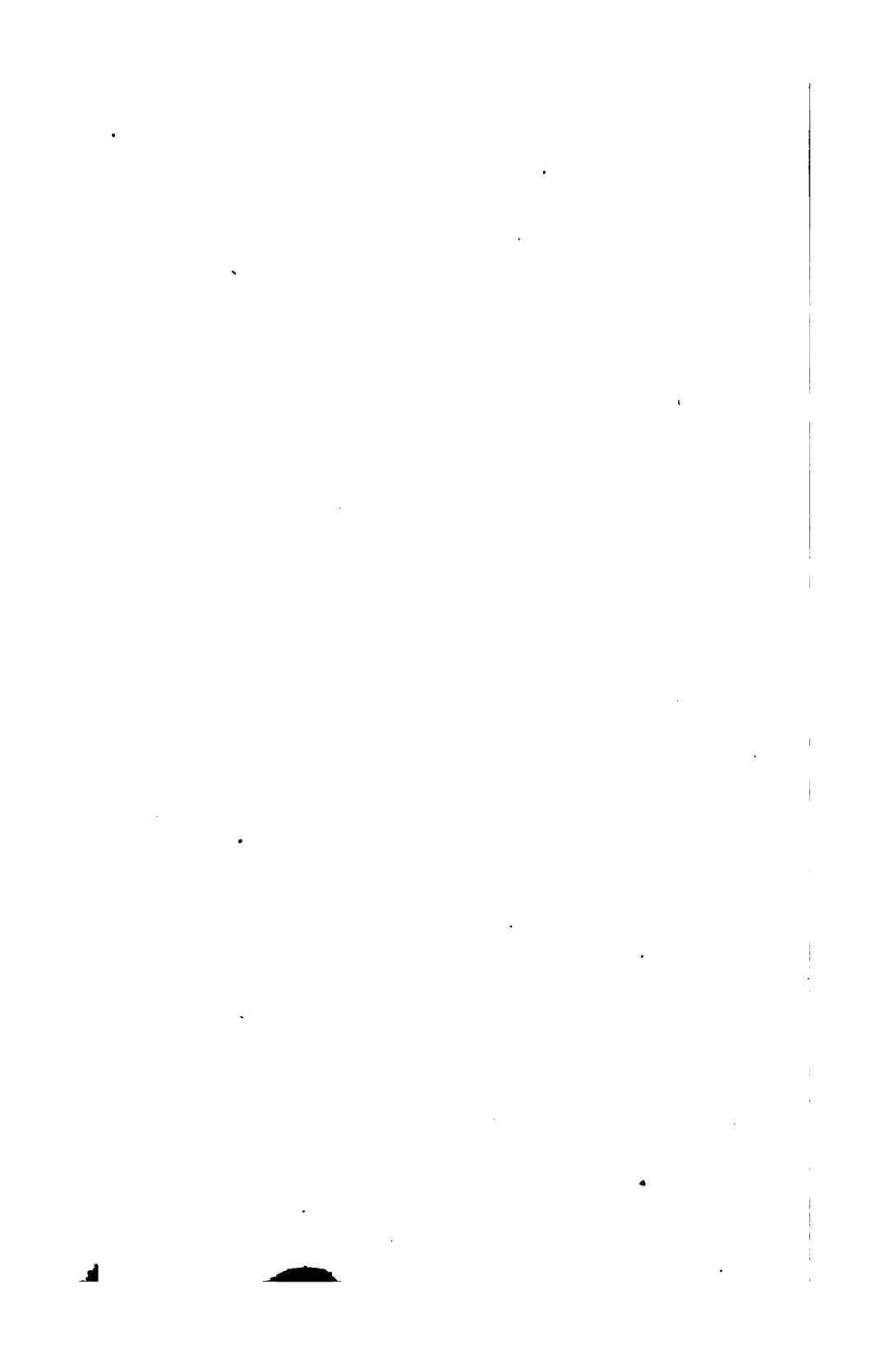


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Tuesday, 13 June 2006

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THE HOUSE OF RABY.



THE HOUSE OF RABY;

OR,

OUR LADY OF DARKNESS.

"Hush! whisper whilst we talk of her! * * * She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of lunacies and the suggestress of suicides. * * * She carries no key, for though coming rarely among men she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And her name is *Mater Tenebrarum*,—Our Lady of Darkness."

DE QUINCEY'S "*Suspiria de Profundis*."

"Of love that never found his earthly close,
What sequel?"

TENNYSON'S "*Love and Duty*."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PART I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE HOUSE OF RABY;
OR,
OUR LADY OF DARKNESS.

CHAPTER I.

MY HOME AND MY AUNT MARGARET.

MY home—my first home—my father's house, I have well-nigh forgotten; but, how well I remember the first time I ever saw my aunt Margaret! It is twenty years ago next May. I was then eight years old, or as we children used to say, "going on for my nine." My mother and nurse Sarah deplored the delicacy of my constitution at that age; but my father said I should "grow strong enough in time, if they would not coddle me so much. The boy wants fresh air and exercise." And he would sometimes add, "We had better send him for a few months to his

aunt Margaret." This proposal was always answered by deprecating looks and words from my mother. She would draw me to her, on such occasions, and kiss me with extra motherly fervour, saying fondly :

" Poor little Frank ! No, no ! Papa will not be so unkind ! He will not send Frank to aunt Margaret !"

Having been accustomed to this sort of thing ever since I was five years old, by the time I was eight the proposal of sending me to my aunt sounded like a tremendous threat. A strange, ill-defined terror was connected with the name of this unknown relative. I remember carefully avoiding to ask questions about her, in hopes that if I did not remind people of her she would be forgotten. And I never liked to have my little ailments mentioned before my father, lest he should talk of sending me to this awful *incognita*.

During the winter of my eighth year I had measles, or some other childish complaint, and was considerably thinned and weakened by it. My mother became very anxious that I should have country air in the spring, and plans were discussed for sending me away

from home. However, they all fell to the ground, because my mother would not let me go anywhere without her, and she herself would not leave home without my father, who was compelled to remain at North Ashurst to superintend some new factories, which no one knew how to manage in those days but himself. In vain my father represented the advantage of this and the other arrangement for establishing her and the children within a few hours' journey of the town; my mother was nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of going away from him. She was equally nervous and uncomfortable at the thought of sending me away from her—even though she sent Sarah, that most trustworthy of head-nurses, to keep watch and ward over me. None of these plans pleased her.

I was sitting on my mother's lap one day after dinner, when she and my father were talking of these things.

"And yet, love," said my mother, with more decision than usual in her tone, "the dear child *must* have change of air. What can we do with him, James?"

"Why not send him to Margaret for the

spring and summer?" asked my father, suddenly.

"Ah! I wonder I never thought of that!" she exclaimed. "Nothing could be better. Carleton is famous for its bracing air and fine hilly situation. The family are sure not to be at the castle before September; so Margaret can have him very well. I shall write directly, and tell her we mean to send him."

"My dear," interrupted my father, "would it not be better to write first, and inquire whether she will be kind enough to take charge of a sickly child, who will necessarily give her much trouble?"

"Oh! there is no need to do that," replied mamma. "You know she has asked us, over and over again, to send down one of the children to stay with her, and we have never sent any of them yet."

"But, Clara, my dear," remonstrated my father, whose sense of propriety was offended by something in my mother's tone, "I do not like the idea of making Margaret a mere convenience, in this way, after having slighted all her kind invitations hitherto."

"Oh! don't trouble yourself about that, love," said my mother, laughing. "You are

over-scrupulous. I am sure Margaret will not mind being made a convenience of; she never did mind it when she was a girl, you know."

"Yes, I know, Clara; and I know also that we were not scrupulous enough, any of us, in minding it for her."

"Well, James, I should like to know of what use old maids are in the world, if one cannot make conveniences of them?"

My father did not seem inclined to reply, but looked rather grave for a minute, and then went out of the room. As soon as he was gone I began to cry.

"What is my sweet pet crying for?" asked mamma, kissing my pale face, and taking me fondly in her arms.

"I don't want to go to aunt Margaret, mamma!" I sobbed out.

"Not want to go to kind, good aunt Margaret? Oh! Frank! Frank! why do you say so?"

"I don't know; but, I don't like her."

"Why, you never saw her, child!"

"I don't care for that. I hate her."

"Do you know, Frank, it is very naughty and wicked to hate your papa's own sister?"

"Is she papa's sister, though?" asked I, stopping my sobs suddenly from surprise. "I did not know that."

"Yes, Frank, she is your papa's sister, and a kind lady, who will be very good to you, and whom you must love." And mamma looked at me more gravely than usual. I was completely puzzled. I felt sure, from what I had so often heard her say before, whenever a visit to aunt Margaret had been talked of, that mamma did not really love her. I could not understand this sudden change of tone; for I had not then learned that interest or convenience often subdues one's liking or disliking, for a time. However, now that I clearly understood what the word *Aunt* meant, I felt that it was very wicked indeed to hate so near a relation; and my childish conscience was eager to throw off the sin.

"Oh, mamma! why did you not tell me before? You always used to say that aunt Margaret was a cross old maid, and you would send me to her if I was a naughty boy. If you had told me that she was kind and good, mamma, I should never have thought of

hating her.—I'm sure I thought you hated her too, mamma."

"How you talk, my child! It is wicked to hate any one, my dear. *Of course* I like your aunt;—and you will be sure to like her when you go to Carleton Castle."

"What! does aunt Margaret live in a castle—a real *castle*?"

"Yes, Frank. Such a fine, grand, beautiful castle!"

How my young imagination warmed at the idea! Then I was actually going to see, to live in a *castle*;—a castle with a moat and a drawbridge, perhaps; and even dungeons! Of course it would be like the castles I had read of in story-books. I questioned mamma eagerly on these and many other points; but she had never been to Carleton, and knew nothing but that there were a village and a large park and a castle all called by that name; that the castle was old and large, and stood on a hill; and that from one of the towers five counties could be seen. All this sounded quite marvellous in my ears;—it seemed too good to be true. It did not occur to me to ask how aunt Margaret came to live

there; but I asked almost every other question on the subject, as I stood beside mamma, with wide-open eyes and flushed cheek. At length she began to fear I should work myself into a fever, and forbade my asking any more questions at that time. She carried me up to the nursery, and laid me down on my little bed, and felt my pulse anxiously.—“May I say just one more thing, mamma? and then I will try to go to sleep, indeed.”

“Well, just one, my darling;—only speak in a whisper.”

“How is it that aunt Margaret lives in a castle? I thought only barons and their wives lived in castles. Now, aunt Margaret is not a baron’s wife, I know; for she is an old maid. The castle at Carleton is not her own, is it?”

“No, my darling! The castle belongs to Lord and Lady Carleton. But aunt Margaret always lives there now, and takes care of everything. She is what is called the housekeeper.”

“Oh! very well! Thank you, dear mamma!” said I, putting my head down on the pillow;—then, starting up again, I put my arms round

her neck, and said, "How soon shall I go to Carleton Castle? To-morrow do you think?"

"Oh dear no! Not to-morrow, nor the next day, nor the day after that." And seeing me greatly agitated, she added softly, "If you do not keep quiet, Frank, and go to sleep, you will be ill again, and then you will not be able to go to Carleton Castle at all." This sobered me effectually; and I lay down and remained quite still. I soon fell asleep, and dreamed a long, happy dream about being in a castle, and walking through galleries, and spacious chambers, and halls; and wandering in woods and gardens. And there was a kind, curiously-dressed old woman, with a high cap and a great bunch of keys at her side, who showed me many fine things,—*that* was aunt Margaret, I thought. I liked her in my dream, and when I woke I wondered whether she would be like *that*. I rather hoped she would.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST JOURNEY.

Most children shrink from the thought of going from home for the first time. I did not, simply because my imagination was fully occupied with beautiful and glorious visions of the place I was going to. And when the evening before my departure for Carleton Castle arrived, I was in a state of eager anticipation. This visit was to be the first occasion on which I should sleep away from home, and I could not calmly entertain the notion that on the following night I should go to bed in a castle, perhaps in a bed with hangings of old tapestry "more than a hundred years old!" That was my *ne plus ultra* of antiquity in those days.

I was more than usually quiet that last night at home; my curiosity about the things of the morrow was so intense. My mother and Sarah supposed I was melancholy at the

thought of leaving home, and tried to console me with the information that I should not stay away very long. I said nothing, but went on dreaming about the place I was going to. I can't say I had any strong regret about leaving home, or mamma, or my nurse and playmates;—I believed that I should return to them very soon.

It was on a fine morning, early in the month of May, that my father took me on this my first visit. I was dressed and had eaten my bread and milk by six o'clock in the morning; and, though I wanted very much to run up and down stairs, and talk to papa and mamma, and see the boxes in the hall, and look out for the coach which was to call for us at seven, yet, Sarah would make me lie down again; for, she said, I was "going to travel more than a hundred miles, and should be *dead tired*" before the end of the day. A hundred miles seemed to me, then, a more than world-wide distance—more than

"From the centre thrice to the utmost pole;"

and I lay passively musing upon such immensity, till mamma came to take me down stairs. In a few minutes the stage coach with

four horses drove briskly up to our door. I was delighted beyond measure, and in a great hurry to bid everybody "Good-bye," and get up to the top of the coach. I remember mamma said, with tears in her eyes, .

"Oh! Frank, my darling! I do really believe you are not at all sorry at going away from your own mother!"

"Oh! mamma, mamma! don't say so, now, or I shall begin to cry. It makes me so miserable to hear you speak such things. I love you very much;—indeed I do;—but—but—Oh! I say! Look there, mamma! He's going to blow the horn, I do believe.—I wish you were going too; mamma."

"Now then, young master! up with you," said the guard, snatching me from the ground. My mother, however, would kiss me once more, and as I saw that her tears were streaming fast, I also began to cry; but I tried very hard to conceal the fact. When I was fairly seated on the top of the coach and looked down for mamma, she was no longer to be seen, but I guessed that she was standing inside the hall, so I bawled out, "Don't cry, mamma!" She came back to the door at the sound of my voice, and nodded and smiled through her

tears. Then I lost sight of papa and mamma both for a minute ; after which papa came out briskly, and climbed up to his place beside me. The guard called out "All right !" the coachman touched the leaders gently with the whip, the coach dashed off along the road ; my father's arm was round me, and he pressed me to him affectionately.

"Now, my boy, here we are ;—going off to Carleton Castle ! You are to get quite well there, you know, and come home a strong little man to mamma."

I could make no answer, for I was busily engaged in swallowing my tears. I was ashamed to be seen crying ; it was "just like a girl," my brother Tom would have said. He never cried when he went to school.

At length I was able to ask questions about the places we were going through ; and my heart had already shaken off its sorrow by the time the coach stopped for breakfast, at ten o'clock.

I shall not enter into the particulars of this my first journey, although I remember every circumstance connected with it, and could give fac-similes of the persons of all the outside passengers, and a fair report of their con-

versation. It was five o'clock in the evening when we stopped at the town of P——. I was lifted down, very tired and sleepy. The coachman was paid ; the coach changed horses and then drove away. We went into the inn, and I heard my father order " Some refreshments directly, and a post-chaise, in half an hour, on to Carleton."

I was too tired to ask any questions, then, and fell asleep while my father was eating, after he had in vain tried to persuade me to eat. When I woke up again, I found myself inside a carriage, with my father's arm supporting me, and my head on his breast. The carriage had windows in front, and I could see a man in a dirty light-blue jacket, riding on one of the horses. Then I knew we were in the post-chaise, and on our way to Carleton Castle. This thought woke me effectually ; and I began to sit up, and talk, and look out of the window. At last we came to the village of Carleton. It seemed to me the prettiest place in the world ;—the cottages were thatched, and most of them were very neat, with well-stocked little gardens ; and the church was all overgrown

with ivy. After driving through the village, the road began to ascend, and we went on more slowly.

"Papa," said I, "why do people call aunt Margaret an old maid? What is an old maid?"

"A lady who has never been married."

"Then is Lucy an old maid?" (Lucy was my sister, aged twelve, then at school.)

"Lucy is not an old maid yet, my boy; she is a young one; but she may be an old maid."

"I hope she will *not*!" said I, vehemently; "I do not like old maids. Sarah says they are always ill-tempered and selfish."

"Sarah is mistaken, Frank. One of the best-tempered and least selfish persons I know is an old maid;—and that is the lady who is going to take care of you, and make you happy—your aunt Margaret."

"I wish she were not an old maid, though!" I exclaimed, after a pause, during which I had tried to divest my mind of all the common-places I had been accustomed to hear about the class. "Why does she not have a husband, like mamma, and Mrs. Collins, and

Mrs. Forbes ? Could she not get one if she were to try ?”

My father smiled, and said he did not know exactly ; but we were to be sure and ask her. “ In the mean time, my boy,” continued he, “ take my word for it, old maids are not all ugly and cross and selfish, as Sarah says. I am afraid she must have been unfortunate in her acquaintance with old maids. By the way, Frank, it is better to say ‘ *unmarried ladies* ;’ it is not considered respectful or polite to call a lady *an old maid*. No gentleman, you know, is ever disrespectful to ladies, or to any one, indeed ; least of all to those who are unprotected in the world.”

“ Unprotected ! I do not understand, papa. I thought aunt Margaret was grown up ; quite an old woman, indeed. Do grown-up people want to be protected, ever ?”

“ Yes, my dear, very often. But we will wait till you are a little older before I try to explain to you that grown-up women sometimes want protectors as much as little boys and girls.—Look there ! That is the great gate of Carleton Park. See ! that is the castle a long way down the avenue !” I strained my

eyes, but I could only distinguish a large building in the distance.

“Are we going in at that beautiful gate, papa?” cried I, lost in wonder at the griffins that seemed to be playing with a golden ball at the top of the great stone gateway. At this moment the chaise stopped, and the postboy called out, “Hoy! hoy! hulloh!” A woman came out from the lodge, and to my father’s request that she would open the gate, replied in what seemed to me a foreign language. But my father understood it, and said to the postboy, “Very well, then! Drive on to the middle gate.” We drove on for another half mile, and then entered the park by the middle gate, which had no lodge, and was always kept unlocked for the convenience of the villagers who had communication with the castle. This gate lead into a drive cut through a wood. It was May; the birds were singing their evensong; the setting sun cast a yellow light over the surface of the ground under the trees just freshly decked with young leaves, bright as those of Paradise. I had never seen a wood in spring-time before, and was amazed by the beauty around

me. My father was delighted with my delight, after the manner of parents.

“Look! look! papa! Thousands and thousands of blue flowers! Oh! hyacinths! are they? How very pretty they are! Oh! and there are primroses. Such heaps and heaps! May I get out? Oh! *do* let us, papa! I never saw such green trees. They all look as if God had made them fresh to-day! Oh! what is that thing, there?—Brown, with bright eyes! running up that tree? What, is that a real, right-down, wild squirrel? Oh, oh! See how he is peeping down! Oh! papa, papa! what a beautiful place! I never thought Carleton was anything like this!”

And I threw myself into my father's arms in a transport of pleasure, so pure, so vivid, that it was the fitting inauguration of my life in that place.

It was nearly dark when we drove into a paved court-yard. I had been too much excited to watch for our approach to the castle itself. When I heard the noise of the chaise on the stones I jumped up from my father's embrace, and stretched my head out of the window. But I quickly drew it back again, and put my hand into my father's.

“Well, my boy, what is the matter?” he asked, soothingly.

“Oh, nothing, papa!” I replied.

The postboy got down and opened the chaise-door. We alighted, and I looked around me, still holding tight by my father’s hand. The evening shades were fast covering the place. The large deserted court, that echoed the slightest footfall, was at that hour gloomy enough to strike terror into the heart of a child, even in robust health; for me, sickly, weary with excitement, and faint with hunger as I was, it had an indescribable horror. Though I knew that the great blackness which reared itself all around me was a castle, I dared not look at it a second time. The one glimpse I had caught when I put my head out of the chaise inspired me with a strange fancy. I recollect it well. The place looked to me like two things which were especially frightful to me. It was like a picture of the Castle of Udolpho, which Sarah never liked me to look at, and it was like our county gaol, which I had once seen—gazing at it in mute horror while Sarah told me about the wicked murderers and thieves who were shut up there till they were taken

out to be hanged.—And this was my first feeling on seeing Carleton Castle. I dared not look up, lest I should see it again; fear fastened my young feet to the earth. My father tried to lead me; I clung to his hand with a convulsive clasp.—Something in my throat prevented my screaming; a cold shudder ran through me, and I sank down on the pavement insensible.

* * * * *

I was half conscious again; but my eyelids seemed too heavy to lift.—I felt a soft, warm air around me, and there was a smell like that of my mother's dressing-room. It was *eau de Cologne*, I knew. Was I back again at home?—I moved my eyes a little—No! That little showed me that the sofa on which I lay was red—mamma's sofa was blue. Then I heard some one say:

“He is recovering, poor child!”

“Ah! whose voice is that?” I asked mentally: but I was too exhausted to look up.

“Frank!—What, my little Frank!”

This time it was my father spoke. I felt

his face close to mine, and I made a feeble effort to kiss him.

"That's right, my darling!" he said tenderly. "So you are quite knocked up with your long journey, and want something to eat. Come, see what your aunt Margaret has got for you."

"Aunt Margaret," I murmured—"is she here?" But I did not move my head from my father's shoulder. Even the pleasure of a first look at this long-talked-of relative could not rouse me. I felt a spoon at my lips, and mechanically swallowed its contents. Then came a second and a third. At length my eyes opened, and the first thing I saw was a lady kneeling beside the sofa where I lay. She held a silver cup, from which she was feeding me.—This was my aunt Margaret.

I do not know how to convey to the reader's mind a correct idea of my aunt, Margaret Hastings;—Miss Hastings of the Castle, as she was called by everybody, of high and low degree, in and about Carleton. If I were to say that her features were not regular, but that she *had the power of being* more beautiful than any regular accredited beauty that

I ever saw, you would think I talked nonsense; and yet, after much thought on the subject, that is the nearest approach that I can make to a correct expression of my meaning.

I suppose I was not less greedy than most little boys—but certain it is that my attention was not at all attracted by the pretty cup and its delicious contents;—perhaps I was too fatigued; or the nervous system of my little body was too excited for the stomach to perform its proper work and crave food eagerly after a long fast. My mental faculties, however, must have been more than usually active, for the impression they received on that first sight of my aunt will never be effaced. How clearly does my memory recal every minute circumstance of that, the most remarkable evening in my childish existence!

As she knelt before me, her eyes on a level with mine, I looked straight into them, with the eager curiosity of a child. How long I looked I do not know; but there seemed to be a long pause, during which we neither of us moved an eyelash. I saw tears gathering in those clear brown eyes of hers; and darting forward from my father's knee,

utterly regardless of the nice compound in that beautiful cup, I threw my little arms round aunt Margaret's neck, and clasping her convulsively, sobbed out :

“ Oh ! I do *love* you so ! ”

I was almost faint with ecstasy. How inexpressibly sweet were the caresses I then received ! Aunt Margaret sank on the floor, being unable to retain her kneeling posture beneath my weight ; and she sat holding me in her lap, and showering kisses on my upturned face, while the fingers of one hand passed and repassed gently through my curls, and that sweet, full voice which had before attracted my attention, murmured the tenderest epithets that a mother can address to a child. After a little time I seemed to recollect something, and raising my head, looked round for my father. I wanted him to sympathise in my happiness. He was looking at me with an anxious smile.

“ Why, Margaret,” said he, laughingly, after a few minutes, “ this is a clear case of love at first sight ! ” He then added, more gravely, “ I had no idea the boy had *this* in him. This over-susceptibility is quite new to me. I never suspected anything of the kind.

How will he bear contact with the world ? I must look to *you* for help here, Margaret."

"God will care for his own ; He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," replied my aunt ; and she pressed a long kiss on my forehead. I opened my eyes once more.

"Can Frank stand now ?" she asked gently. I tried to rise immediately, for I felt that she *wished* me to do so ; and, at that moment, it would not have been possible for me to resist her will. Perhaps this was the effect of animal magnetism, perhaps it was merely the force of child-like obedience.

We both stood up, and I still held by my aunt's hand.

"He had better go to bed directly, I suppose," said my father.

"Oh ! no, no, no !" I exclaimed passionately, clinging to my aunt, in mingled dread of the anticipated old tapestried bed, and the fear of losing sight of this suddenly loved relation.

"No," she said, "he is over-excited now, and had better remain with us till he is calmer. He shall lie here while we take tea." And suiting the action to the word, she lifted me to the sofa again. "There, that is better than

going to bed all by oneself. Is it not, Frank?" And she settled me comfortably, in a sitting posture, among the soft pillows, so that I might amuse myself by seeing all that went on in the room. Then she sat down beside me, and said, "You are to sleep in my bedroom to-night; and you shall not go to bed till I go." I suppose my face expressed the great relief this information was to my mind; for my aunt laughed and said, "Ah! you see, Frank, I know everything that is in little boys' minds. Now sit still, darling, and you shall have some nice tea; though you did throw over all the egg-wine and spoil my best silk gown. Look at this, Master Frank!" And she held out the skirt of her gown, which had been deluged with the contents of the pretty silver cup.

I was now getting quite myself again, and enjoyed the tea and the sandwiches, and listening to the conversation upon all sorts of family matters which took place between my father and his sister. But when they began to talk of persons with whom I was unacquainted, I did not listen any longer, but amused myself with examining the room in which we were.

CHAPTER III.

AUNT MARGARET'S PARLOUR.

THE room was spacious and nobly proportioned. It was so lofty, that by the light of the lamp I could not clearly distinguish the carvings on the ceiling and cornices. The floor as well as the walls and ceiling was of polished dark oak. Nearly the whole of the side of the room opposite to me seemed to be covered with crimson drapery. It was in reality a large bay-window before which the curtains were drawn. Facing this window, and behind the sofa on which I lay, was the door; before it an Indian screen was unfolded. On one side was the great fireplace, with its high chimney-piece of carved white marble—a wonderful piece of sculpture which I was never tired of admiring in after years. On either side of the fireplace was an arched recess filled with bookcases. Opposite the fire-

place I observed what seemed like a very deep recess, but I could not see very well, because a curtain was drawn half-way across it. The only thing which I could see inside it was the edge of a gilded picture-frame gleaming near the opening. The furniture of this room was of a kind I had never seen before. It has since become very fashionable; and may be met with now in very inappropriate places—in modern papered drawing-rooms and silken boudoirs. In my aunt's parlour, the high-backed chairs, massy tables, and elaborately-carved cabinets of black oak were in accordance with the room itself. Stately and picturesque as was the aspect of this room, it had also an air of comfort and quiet, such as one seldom sees, except in cosy little rooms. It was a proper lady's bower, but Lady Carleton would as soon have thought of tearing down the tapestry in the banqueting-hall as of turning Miss Hastings out of the oak-parlour; although she was once heard to tell a royal duke who was on a visit at Carleton, that "the housekeeper's room was the most comfortable, the most complete thing in the castle;" and that "the state-rooms were common-place and tawdry compared with it."

Much as her ladyship admired this room, there were reasons why Miss Hastings retained it.

In this oak-parlour my aunt passed all the best years of her life; and the oak-parlour was certainly sympathetic, and gave her back in its quiet beauty and cheerful aspect the benefits she had shed upon all around her. There was no accumulation of ornamental rubbish; there was plenty of space to move about in; the handsomest articles of furniture were useful, and those of the commonest utility, footstools, corner-cupboards, writing and work-tables, &c., were remarkable for their beauty in that particular style of artistic upholstery which was the fashion among our great-great-grandfathers.

I lay, quiet enough, examining everything I could see with curious eyes; now, lost in admiration of the cherubs springing from the corners of a carved cabinet; and anon, endeavouring to make out the scene depicted on a china vase surmounting the said cabinet. At last, the beautiful marble carvings of the mantelpiece, displayed in strong relief as they were by the brightly blazing wood fire, riveted my attention. Those fierce-looking animals standing on their hind legs, each

holding a great ball between its fore-paws, were griffins, I knew ; for they were just like those I had seen on the gate. I thought I should very much like to see a real live griffin ; and was wondering what country they came from, and whether there was any chance of my seeing one in a *menagerie*, where I had seen a lion and an ostrich, among other strange beasts, last year ; when my infant musings were disturbed by a movement at the tea-table. I had not heard the previous conversation, which had lasted long, and had been carried on in a low familiar voice, for, at least, an hour after the meal was finished. Now, my aunt and my father were talking louder, and with animation ; they had evidently forgotten me for the moment, and were deep in the luxury of recalling past pleasures. They both stood up, and my father grasped the pedestal of the lamp, saying, " I have heard nothing of *Pergolese* for ten years ! —Where shall I carry this ?"

"To the oratory," replied aunt Margaret, stepping lightly across the room towards the great recess which I mentioned before. My father, holding the lamp, followed with slow and hesitating steps.

“ Ah, you do not feel at ease on my slippery floor, I see !” said my aunt, turning to watch him with an affectionate smile.

“ What are they going to do ?” thought I. In another moment my aunt drew back the beautiful curtain, and I saw what was in the recess.

It had been in former days an oratory, and was lighted, in the daytime, by a curious oval-shaped window, or *œil-de-bœuf*, of richly-coloured glass. This window was placed high up in the wall, so as to cast its light down upon the front of a beautiful chamber-organ, and a few other articles. During the day-time, the effect of the gorgeous colours, cast like a shattered rainbow all over that recess, was singularly beautiful. On seeing it for the first time, you would be impressed by a sense of mystery and dim magnificence. No painter could succeed in giving a faithful representation of that paradise of colouring ; nor do I think it would look well in a picture ever so faithfully executed. I have tried many times to get something like the subdued richness, the intense yet thin and delicate hues of the shifting light, the dusky depth of shadow in the corners, and the vivid spots

which at certain times lay like great carbuncles, emeralds, sapphires, and amethysts, upon the white keys of the organ, or the dark-gleaming floor.

On this first night, I saw no varied hues ; but I felt a great admiration for that beautiful recess, even then. My father placed the lamp on a small table, and while my aunt selected a music-book from a stand and prepared to sing, I rose gently and crept after them, to see better what was to be seen. The picture on the wall seemed to be a picture of that very organ, with a beautiful lady playing on it, while a group of angels were coming down from the sky to listen. It was a St. Cecilia by Correggio. There were two music-stands and a violin-case in one corner ; a guitar and a harp-lute were on an old harpsichord ; and these, with a small table and one or two seats, were all that could be seen, besides the picture and the organ. But there was something that could *not* be seen, that attracted my attention irresistibly. The back of the organ did not touch the wall ; there seemed a wide space behind it. What was to be seen there ? I was about to run forward to look, when the sounds of the organ fixed me to the spot. I

sat down gently on the folds of the long curtain, and grasped a portion of it, while I listened in rapture to the symphony; and then to my aunt's voice, as it gave forth with solemn sweetness the "*Sanctum et terribile*" of a mass by Pergolese. The end of that rich music I did not hear; for my overwrought spirit sank beneath its fatigues. I was found, some time afterwards, fast asleep, and was carried to bed, where I slept many, many hours; a dreamless, refreshing sleep;—heedless alike of my absence from my own home, the vastness of Carleton Castle, or the wonders of my aunt Margaret's parlour.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK OF WONDER.

WHEN I awoke the sun was high in the sky, and pouring a very flood of radiance through a large window opposite my bed. I started up, and tried to recollect where I was. The room was much larger and more handsomely furnished than any chambers I had been accustomed to see. It had an air of grandeur which, though strange, was, by no means, unpleasant to me. Yes! *This* was certainly rather like my idea of a bed-chamber in a castle. But, still, I should have thought this had been the "lady's chamber" and not the housekeeper's. Again, when I recollected that this housekeeper was the sweet lady I had seen last night,—my aunt—my father's sister,—it appeared quite proper that she should sleep in so beautiful a room; in that great, carved bedstead with the blue silk drapery,

which she had evidently occupied last night ; that she should dress herself before that magnificent toilette, that she should sit in that throne-like chair, and be looked down upon by those beautiful ladies and stately gentlemen whose pictures hung on the walls. I felt that my new-found relative was fitly lodged. But if this were the housekeeper's room, what must be the splendour of my Lady Carleton's ? Perhaps it would be as beautiful as some of the apartments described in the Arabian Tales, where cedar and precious stones, carved ivory and beaten gold, form the chief materials for the builder and upholsterer !

I remember even now the intense admiration with which I looked upon everything I could see as I lay in bed, leaning on one elbow, with my little head on my hand. Considering what my parents were, I could not have been imbued with a vulgar taste for mere show ; it was not the fine furniture and the spacious apartment only that struck me at the moment ; it was the traditionary associations that moved me ; the vision of power, wealth, and high rank which they called up. I did not know the value of what I saw, in a commercial or fashionable point of view ; to me it was,

even at that early age, worth argosies of historical and artistic treasure; value unknown in the auctioneer's account-books.

The pictures on the walls attracted me more than anything else. There were none of any antiquity. All were "counterfeit presentments" of living or recently deceased members of the Carleton family. Of these, two riveted my attention. They were full-length portraits of young men. They were evidently brothers, and from the similarity of age and appearance they would generally be taken for twins; as, indeed, they were. Their age seemed to be about twenty; both were handsome—with a strong likeness, and yet a strange unlikeness in the two faces. One had a gay and smiling aspect; the other looked sad, and a little fierce or wild. The latter frightened me at a first glance, and charmed me at the second. Child as I was, there was something in that lightning and cloud countenance which drew my eyes away from the happy face beside it. I sat upright to look at it better. Presently I fancied the large eyes gave out a kind glance at me. I looked and looked—and the more I looked the more I was pleased with that beautiful, mournful face—with the strange light

in the eyes. When my aunt came to tell me to get up, she found me standing in my night-gown before this picture—shading my eyes with my hands, and my little figure drawn to its full height that I might examine it the better. When I felt her hand on my shoulder I looked up at her and asked, almost in a whisper, as if awe-stricken,

“Who is that, aunt?”

“Mr. Arundel Raby.”

“I thought it was a lord, aunt! He looks so noble! Do not all lords look like that?”

“Oh dear no!” She said it with a little laugh. Then she stooped down and kissed me, and raising me in her arms, held me up to look at the picture.

“So you like this gentleman, do you, Frank?”

“Oh yes, aunt. Is he alive now? Shall I ever see him?”

“He is alive; but I do not think you will ever see him. He is very ill. Look at this other gentleman. It is his brother—the Earl of Carleton; the owner of the castle and all this beautiful park.” (And she pointed to the wide sunny landscape through the window.)

“I like *his* face, too. He looks so happy.

I suppose it makes him happy to be Earl of Carleton, and to have such heaps and heaps of fine things for his own. I suppose he gives half of everything to his brother. I should."

"Mr. Raby does not want any of these things. Besides, he has a castle of his own; and North Ashurst belongs to him."

"What, North Ashurst, where we live—where papa's factories and the coal-pits are?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Then he is very rich. Why does he not look happy?"

"He is ill."

"He would be happy, though, if he were well?—as happy as his brother?" I asked.

"It does not make people happy to be very rich and to be lords, my dear boy," said my aunt, looking from me to the portrait.

"But he looks good, aunt. Mamma says good people are always happy."

"Mamma is mistaken, Frank. Mr. Raby is a good man, but he is not happy. Now, make haste and dress yourself."

The journey down stairs to breakfast gave me a glimpse of vast fields of enjoyment for days and weeks to come. We passed along a

corridor hung with old, dim pictures. Many doors led into this corridor. Some were open, and showed portions of strange rooms; and here and there a narrow, winding staircase, leading up or down. When we arrived at the end, there was another corridor communicating with it, at a right angle, having a painted window at the other extremity. This corridor was entered by an arch, having crimson curtains looped up on each side. In the recess of a window at our right hand, which commanded the full view of this second gallery, sat a thin, grey-haired man, eating his breakfast at a little table, and reading a book. He seemed very comfortable. As soon as he heard us, which was not till we were close upon him, for the galleries were covered with soft matting, and we had not spoken, he rose, laid down his book, and walked before us a few steps to throw open a large door. My aunt said a few words to him in a language I did not understand; which he answered in a respectful tone, and with a profound bow. I was very curious to know what they said. I held my aunt's hands and looked up at him. He was very grave, and did not look at me. We passed through the door, which the grave

man shut behind us ; and I thought I heard him turn the key on the other side. But I forgot the circumstance in a moment, for my attention was attracted by what was before my eyes. We were in a spacious landing overlooking the great hall. Two flights of marble steps swept up from opposite sides of the hall, and met at this landing-place. My aunt ran lightly down one of these flights of steps, saying, " Make haste, my dear ; we have kept papa waiting for breakfast." I wondered at the easy way she moved about in that grand hall ; and thought I never should get courage to run up those stairs, two steps at a time, as I used to do at home.

She turned into a passage leading from the hall, and in a few minutes we were in a cheerful room, which I recognised as my aunt's parlour. It looked very different by daylight, when the warm sun was illuminating the oak-walls, and the window displayed that glorious prospect which has since become so familiar to my eyes and so dear to my heart. In all the fine parks of this lovely land of ours, I do not believe that there is a fairer, richer, and more extensive view than the one to be seen from the terrace outside that win-

dow—on the cushioned seat of which I lounged away more days of youth than I care to count. I have seen many sweeps of wood and groups of trees—many gently-swelling hills and dark-tinted hollows—many a smooth silver lake, with its bright nourishing stream—but none that, in all fortunate circumstances of natural arrangement, could compete with those that filled my little heart with gladness as I saw them in the sunlight on that first morning at Carleton.

“ Well, Frank, my boy ! down at last ! I began to fear that you had lost yourself somewhere in this big house. So ! you are quite well again this morning, I see ; and look as if you would like to be scampering away among the trees yonder. Well ! well ! come and have some breakfast first ; and then I dare say your aunt will allow you to have a run.” And my father lifted me up and kissed me tenderly.

I remained silent. Too many new ideas were crowding on my mind at once ; the time to communicate my impressions and to ask questions had not yet arrived. I was silent as I kissed my father, and took my seat at the table. My eyes wandered round the room, eagerly inspecting the objects which had so

excited my imagination the previous evening. I scarcely heard what my father and my aunt were talking about, and as they did not seem to heed me, I pursued my investigations undisturbed. I felt as if I should not have time enough in the two months I was to stay with my aunt to become familiar with all the wonders, beautiful and grotesque, which filled this single apartment; and as to being able to see everything, or half the things in the castle, *that* seemed as hopeless as my infant desire to read all the books in my father's library. The walk from my bedroom that morning had given me the terrible idea that I might easily lose myself in so vast a place, with so many rooms, and staircases, and galleries; and that I might never be found any more, at least, not until I was a skeleton. Suddenly I recollected the man who had opened the door at the end of the corridor upstairs. Yes! *that* must be what he was there for; and I supposed there must be other men stationed in various parts of the huge edifice for the same purpose. I would ask.

"Aunt Margaret!"

"Well, my dear;" and the beautiful, kind eyes turned on me.

"Is the man that opened the door for us kept there to prevent people from losing themselves in the castle?"

"No, my dear." And the kind eyes turned away.

My father laughed, and patted my head. "I dare say you think there ought to be half a dozen men, at least, placed in different parts, to prevent little boys from being lost here. I should not be surprised if there are. You need not fear, Frank. There will be plenty of people to direct you home to your aunt's room if you should miss the way. So don't be afraid of going about, and looking at everything. You may go now, if you like. And, tell me, when I see you again, whether you don't think there are some capital nooks and corners to play at hide-and-seek in."

"Stop a moment!" said my aunt. "He must get a little accustomed to the place before he will like to go about by himself. Susan is very good-natured; and he can go about the house with her, till we are ready to walk." The bell was rung, and Susan appeared.

"Susan, I want you to take Master Frank with you for an hour. You can show him

the library and the banqueting-room, before you go up to my room."

Susan seemed pleased, and took my hand. I liked the look of her; and we left the room together. As soon as the heavy door was closed, which effectually shut out sounds, Susan showed the liveliness of her character by catching me up in her arms, and running along one or two passages, humming the tune of "The Campbells are coming," till she arrived in the great hall, where she seated me on a huge table, and burst into a merry laugh. It was so contagious, that I burst out laughing too; when the laugh subsided, Susan stroked my hair and kissed me, and then I kissed her; upon which she said, "Bless its little heart," and kissed me again.

"Come, come! none of that shocking waste, if you please, my lady!" said a cheerful voice—a man's voice—somewhere about in the hall; but being unused to the place, I did not detect the exact spot from whence it came, till I followed the direction of Susan's laughing eye, as she said, "Go along with you, Mr. Joyce! I declare you are always to be found just when you are not wanted!"

Mr. Joyce was a tall, sprightly-looking

young man, who appeared to be engaged in arranging some plants on a large stand near the great door, leading into the court-yard. He did not seem to be particularly anxious to finish his work, for he came forward to the table on which I was seated, with my arm round Susan's neck.

"Don't say I'm not wanted, Susan. You know you want me to come and look at this newest specimen of the human plant."

"Lord! Joyce! don't begin and call the child names. He ain't a plant, nor a specimen. He's a boy—a very nice little boy; and I'm very fond on him."

"Yes, I see you are. You made it plain enough just now, on purpose to provoke me, I suppose. Well, considering he's such a little tender slip,"—and he patted my cheek kindly,—“I'll forgive you. And, now, tell us, who is he? No relation of our family, surely?—Yet—eh?”—looking at me again, and very intently—“he's got a strange look of——”

"Hush!" said Susan, in a whisper, and glancing up towards the landing-place above, at the end of the hall—"mind what you say. —I saw it last night.—It gave me quite a turn! It's very odd.—But it *can't* be *really*.—

Ah! what would the earl give for such a boy! —To think of the title and everything going to strangers for want of an heir!—As if girls were nobodies, forsooth! I wish I could turn this boy into a Raby!—But his name is Hastings."

"*That's* very likely!" said Joyce, with a knowing look.

"For shame! you're quite wrong there, any way," said Susan, tossing her head indignantly, and turning scarlet. You shan't say such things of my mistress! That comes of the nasty backbiting tongues you listened to in London. I'm ashamed of you!"

"Well, Susan, don't get into a passion!"

"It does put me in a passion to hear Miss Hastings spoken of in that way. You don't know her. She's as good a lady as any of the family. Ask my lord and my lady what they would have done without her! Why, if it hadn't been for her——"

"Hush! look at the child!" said Joyce, directing her attention to my eager face.

Susan started as she looked at me, and said, "Lord! bless the child!"

"You don't mean to tell me there's nothing in that likeness?" said Joyce, in a whisper.

“ Why he’s as like the family as a cutting is to the old plant. Don’t tell me ! I shall let our people in London know all about it.”

“ But I *do* tell you. Why, his own father’s here now. He’s my mistress’s brother. If you go and spread any such abominable lies about,—if you so much as ever mention it again to any one but me,—I take my Bible oath, William Joyce, I’ll never keep company with you any more !” And Susan looked as if she meant what she said.

Joyce was confounded at her vehemence for a moment ; but, recovering himself, he said, in a subdued tone, “ Why, Susan, I didn’t mean any offence to you ;—far from it. I spoke in a joke. Of course, I won’t speak of it again if you think there’s nothing in it. Come, kiss and be friends.”

“ For being friends—well and good ! I ain’t at enmity with you ; but I’m not going to kiss you for one while, after that. You’re too foul-mouthed. Get rid of the London dirt, William. It don’t improve you.” And Susan snatched me from the table, and marched off, leaving Joyce looking after us rather foolishly.

“ Are you my aunt’s servant, or are you

Lady Carleton's?" I asked of Susan, as we went away.

"I am your aunt's servant, Master Frank."

"Do you love my aunt, Susan?"

"Well, then, that I do. And it would be a shame if I didn't; for she saved my father from ruin, years ago, and she's always been good to me."

"Joyce, the man we saw just now;—he does not like my aunt, does he?"

"He don't know her yet. He's only lately come here. When he knows her he will be sure to like her. Everybody, almost, likes Miss Hastings, in our part."

"Thank you, Susan! I'm so glad of that. I love her *so* much, though I never saw her till last night. I don't know how it is, but I don't want to know some people at all to love them. I only want to look at them."

We had now entered my aunt's bedroom, and Susan had begun to make the bed. I stood still before the portrait of Mr. Arundel Raby for some time.—"I love *him*," I said, at length, "only from seeing his picture. Is he so *very* ill, Susan?"

Susan looked a little alarmed at this question, and replied, shaking a blanket with

unnecessary energy, "I can't tell. How should I know?—Don't ask me any questions, child.—What do you stand staring at that picture for all this time?—Why don't you look at these beautiful ladies? This is the Countess Caroline, my lord's mother. This is my lady."

"Because I like *this* picture better than all the rest put together. But who are those little girls?"

"They are Lady Alice and Lady Geraldine Raby, the only children of the earl and countess. You would like to have them here to play with."

"I don't like playing with girls," I said.

Susan took me presently to see the painted window in the banqueting-room. Keats' description of the window of Madeline's chamber, in the "St. Agnes' Eve," might have been written for this darling and admiration of my childhood.

I could not satiate my eyes with gazing; and when, at last, Susan was obliged to take me away, she promised that I should go into that room every day as long as I stayed.—The chapel and the library, though they became dear to me in after life, made little

impression upon me then;—my mind's eye was dazed with the glories of colour. I have fancied, since, that Titian and Rubens must have intoxicated their spirits during infancy with the magic wine distilled from the rainbow;—that they must have found in Italian and Flemish cathedrals and palaces the gladdening influences which, in a less degree, streamed into my soul from the walls and windows of that banqueting-room. I have seen much finer specimens of colour since, but I would not lose the recollection of my first week's silent, solitary revel in that deserted room for a hecatomb of *chef-d'œuvres* by the best masters.—I walked out with my father and aunt; and I saw deer, and trees, and water, but all through “innumerable stains and splendid dyes.”

CHAPTER V.

A GLIMPSE OF HIDDEN THINGS.

My father spent a few days with his sister, and then returned home, leaving me under her care. The first month of my stay was filled with enjoyment and renovated health. I drank in knowledge copiously, and my imagination was always active. I believe the only drawback to my bliss was the certainty that it would soon come to an end ; that I must go home at last, and be sent to school with my boisterous brothers.

I soon made myself tolerably acquainted with the geography of the castle, at least of those parts which, as Susan expressed it, "were allowed to be shown." I ran about and played in them, much as I liked. Susan was my frequent companion, and I soon became very fond of her. Joyce I never took to thoroughly. I could not forget that

disrespectful look when he and Susan had quarrelled about my aunt. I did not understand anything by it, more than the fact that he did not seem to like her. This I could not forgive. Besides, he was very cross to me sometimes, and would never allow me to go near a fine conservatory which extended along great part of the terrace, and which I felt an irresistible longing to enter. I would follow him slyly when I knew he was going there, and try to peep at the wondrous and beautiful plants within; but the lower part of the glass was ground, so that I could see nothing except at a door. Never once would he listen to my entreaty.

"No, no, Master Frank," he would say, "I never let little boys in here. Why! Lord Carleton would cut my head off if he thought I allowed a little boy even to look into it. When your aunt likes to bring you here, well and good—I have nothing to say agin *that*, of course. But I won't have any little boys damaging my plants. I wonder what my lord would say! Here, you, Maddox! mind you never let this gentleman come running and making a litter on my terrace!"

Maddox was a tall, stout man, who used to

walk a great deal up and down that same terrace, and always drove me away whenever he saw me approaching. I never could find out what Maddox did besides walk up and down that side of the castle. It seemed to me to be a very easy sort of life. When I asked my aunt what Maddox did there? she told me he was the watchman; and that there was always a watchman about the castle. When I asked why he did not watch all round the castle, instead of on that side only? my aunt replied that Lord Carleton valued the things on that side of the castle more than those elsewhere. I thought that Lord Carleton was in the right there,—as the beautiful conservatory and my aunt's parlour—and the south corridor, with the painted window and the beautiful pictures, were all on that side.—I was not allowed to play in the south corridor, which led to what were called the countess's rooms, although I went into it once or twice with François or my aunt.

François was the old Frenchman whom I had seen eating his breakfast in the window-recess on the morning after my arrival. I thought then that he looked cross; but I soon had reason to alter my opinion, and

became very fond of him at the end of a week. He never seemed to have anything to do but read a book and look out of the windows and walk in the corridors—the south (the one I was not allowed to play in) and the west, which led to my aunt's bedroom. He never seemed to go into any other parts of the building. I always found him in the same place, and glad to see me. I generally spent the first hour after breakfast with François. He would take me on his knee and explain heraldic books, in which I soon began to take an interest. He would smile brightly and pat me on the head, saying :

“*Bien ! bien ! mon petit ! C'est dommage que tu n'es pas né grand seigneur, car tu en as bien l'air !*” or some such thing, and when I requested that he would explain his meaning in English, as I did not understand French yet, he would tell me that he had said, “I vill teach you la langue Française, and then you vill be able to seem quite like one lord.” And François began to give me lessons in French.

One evening, early in June, I sat in the window of my aunt's parlour, reading an old book which I had borrowed from Fran-

çois. King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table had then complete possession of my mind. I had been sent out across the park with a message to John Green, the keeper, by my aunt. Reluctantly had I laid aside my book, and departed. Fortune seemed to favour me ; for, scarcely had I been gone ten minutes when I met Green himself, and joyfully delivered the message and scampered back, in glee, to my dear story-book ; having escaped an hour and a half's absence from it. Aunt Margaret was gone from the parlour, but there was no need to find her on purpose to tell her I had been saved the walk. She would return presently, and then I could tell her why I had come back so soon. So I flung myself on the cushioned window-seat, and, resting the great book on the ledge of the open window, went on devouring my tale, and conjuring up a vision of Sir Launcelot du Lac. The rays of the setting sun made my head quite warm, and dazzled my eyes by playing on the page,—bees, heavily laden, buzzed slowly homewards from the near flower-beds,—other insects flew past tinged with all colours,—soft breezes, sweet with perfumes, lifted my hair, but of these I saw and felt nothing. I

was absorbed in my book. At last, however, when the sun had gone down, the wind blew cooler, and I could no longer see the faint brown type. I closed the book, and, in a fit of childish musing, sat gazing out over the fast-darkening landscape.

How still everything seemed! All was quiet within the huge castle; and nothing moved or made a sound without, except the breeze in the magnolia which was trained against the window. I sat a long time, calling up picture after picture from the story I had read, and painting them on the dark landscape. I saw Queen Guenever, in a green velvet robe, walking in the forest. I saw Sir Launcelot fight with another knight. I saw the whole Court of King Arthur at a tournament. Suddenly my reverie was interrupted. A strange sound of voices seemed very near me. I looked round; there was no one in the dark room. It must be Susan and Joyce talking in some of the lower passages, as they often did, I knew, in the evening. I rose and opened the door of the room. All was still in that direction. It must have been fancy!—and vexed at having been interrupted in my reverie, I turned back towards my

former seat in the window. Before reaching it, I heard the same sounds again. They seemed to come from the recess where the organ stood. I entered it, and though it was quite dark, I felt sure that there was nobody there. I therefore concluded that there must be some persons talking in the corridor above, and was turning away again to the window, when a voice sounded indistinctly, speaking near me—a man's voice—one that I did not remember to have heard before. His words did not reach my ear; but these in reply did:

“Indeed! indeed! you are wrong! If my lord——” And the voice that uttered them was that of my aunt Margaret.

For a moment I was bewildered, and a little terrified. Where was she? Who was she talking to?—“My lord!”—It must be Lord Carleton come home to the castle! Again I heard the other voice; and this time the words were plain enough; their tone I shall never forget, for my heart-strings vibrated to that deep, wild, pathetic music.

“Margaret Hastings! why are you so proud? May I not seek to add a little to your happiness? Hear me, now, Margaret! *My Margaret!*”

There was a pause as if feeling had impeded utterance; and I heard my aunt's soothing voice again.

"I *will* hear all you have to say. But not now! You shall see the child. Rest assured that——" The words seemed to die in the distance, as if the speakers were moving slowly away.

Let the reader imagine the state of my mind as I stood rolling my eyes round about, above, and below, in the darkness, as if I expected the walls to open and reveal the secret place in which my aunt held converse so strange. A recollection came suddenly, like an inspiration, to my mind. There was a space—a something—perhaps *a door*, at the back of the organ. I had noticed it on the night of my arrival, and had forgotten it since. I crept round the instrument, fearlessly, dark as it was.—Ah! what was that?—A bright light streaming through a keyhole! On almost any other occasion I believe I should have hesitated to gratify my curiosity by looking through a keyhole; on the present, I gave myself no time for reflection, but darted at once to the spot. At first I could see nothing but a blaze of light.

After a few minutes, objects became distinct ; or, at least, I seemed to see them distinctly. Yet vividly and distinctly as I saw them, it was difficult to believe they were real—that I was not dreaming ! They were so similar to those which fancy had called up in my late reverie over that beautiful fairy romance, that for some moments I doubted whether I were not one of those fortunate children I had read of who are favoured by fairies, and permitted to see things invisible to common human eyes. I had been assured that there were no such things as fairies ; and that the stories about King Arthur and the glorious world of Romantic Chivalry were not true. But what of that ? Could I disbelieve my eyes ?

The magic world on the other side of that door was more beautiful than any I had pictured to myself. I looked down a long arcade of trees and shrubs of a strange growth and marvellous beauty. They were trees and shrubs of a foreign land, I knew ; for I had seen pictures of many of them. Palms and acacias, date-trees and plantains, bent their graceful tops from either side, and formed a luxuriant arch, from the centre of which, at regular

intervals, hung what seemed to me to be the most beautiful silver and alabaster lamps, which shed a mild radiance—something between sunlight and moonlight—up among the feathery acacias and the broad palms, and down upon the dark green tropical vegetation, which grew thickly beneath them, and clustered round their tall stems, showing here and there the richest-coloured blossoms. The pathway down this grove was paved with the most delicate mosaic. Far away, where the lamps were blended in one cluster, and where the trees seemed to meet each other, a fountain sprung up into the air, and fell again in a shower of glittering spray. Its basin I could not see. It looked as if it had sprung, at a wish, from the ground, at the feet of the two persons who stood beside it.

Were *they* mere mortals?—A man and a woman? Their attitudes were so dignified, that to me they seemed a true King and Queen of Romance. At first I could not see their faces; but presently they turned, and began to walk slowly down the beautiful arcade towards the door where I was.

Could that graceful, stately lady be, indeed, my aunt? My aunt transformed into a queen!

How well the transformation became her ! Queen Guenever, in my fancy, had worn just such a green velvet gown, sweeping the ground as she walked ; and ever after, when I pictured that fair dame to my eye, she wore a head-dress such as my aunt wore then. It was a sort of kerchief of netted gold laid over the top of the head, looped up gracefully on either side, with the ends touching the shoulders. It was rich and simple, and to my fancy the fine dress made my aunt's sweet face perfectly beautiful. Her dark eyes looked larger and more lustrous than usual, as they were raised to the face of her companion, who looked down upon her with a sort of melancholy satisfaction. If I was astonished at seeing my own near relation in such a mysterious position, I was much more so when I recognised in her companion the original of that portrait which had laid so firm a hold on my fancy. To be sure, the person I now saw bodily walking with my aunt was much older-looking than the picture. But I never doubted for a moment that it was Mr. Arundel Raby. The costume was somewhat like that of the picture, and the wild beauty of the features was scarcely altered by

years, except, perhaps, that the face was more full of thought, and of a certain indescribable tenderness.

They lingered in their walk, and pointed out to each other various beautiful blossoms. Mr. Raby stepped aside to gather a flower which my aunt admired; as he bent his head, in presenting it, she raised one of her beautiful arms, and putting back a mass of hair which had fallen over his forehead, looked earnestly into his eyes. Soon she smiled—that sweet smile of hers,—and I heard her say :

“Yes, it is true. You are much better this time. God be thanked! We must be more careful with you now.”

“And you, Margaret,” said he, touching her cheek gently with the flower, “you look better. You are brighter than usual. You seldom look so on our first meeting. Your brother’s visit has done this; or perhaps, the presence of the child.”

“Perhaps it is that. But I shall be better still; and so I think you will if we have a little music. Will you give me some now?”

“Will I not?” And his melancholy face became radiant. He stepped towards the

door, behind which I remained breathless with curiosity.

"Stay, love," said my aunt ; "it is fastened on the other side, and there may be some one there. You had better ring for François."

Mr. Raby walked away towards the fountain. My aunt stood still where he had left her. She held to her lips the beautiful flower he had given her ; and her calm, deep eyes followed him as he went. Had I been old enough to read all that her attitude and her face expressed, I should have learned a lesson concerning the perfection of womanly love. He came back with a quicker step towards her, and the smile returned to her face. Again he drew her arm within his, and they moved on together—a noble, loving pair—looking silently on each other with the fullness of confidence and affection. Presently François appeared, walking towards them. Mr. Raby spoke briefly, in French.

To whom François replied, "*Oui, milor ;*" and then glanced towards my aunt. She said a few words in the same language ; among which I detected "*cette porte,*" "*mon neveu,*" and "Susan," which I understood. François bowed and retired. I just stayed to watch the

two stately figures begin to glide once more down that beautiful grove, and then I crept away from my loophole of observation back into the dark parlour, where I took up my former place at the window, and looked out into the dusky park. All was as still as before except my own young heart, which beat wildly with wonder and curiosity at the scene to which I had just been a witness. In a few minutes Susan came into the room with a lamp.

“Oh! there you are, Master Frank. I have been looking everywhere for you. Your aunt has sent to say you are to go to bed directly. It is long past your bedtime. Come along.”

And catching me up in her arms, the merry girl carried me off to bed; where, as the reader may suppose, I did not go to sleep very soon, especially as the full notes of the organ and some other musical instruments, besides the sounds of the human voice in concert with them, were borne now fully and distinctly, now vaguely and faintly to my listening ear. I was sorely tempted to steal out of bed and find my way nearer to that delicious music, but I was afraid to displease

my aunt ; and so I lay looking at the portrait of Mr. Arundel Raby, as it gleamed out in the moonlight, and thinking what a nice face he had, and how glad I was that he was so fond of my aunt. Suddenly a thought came into my mind—Why did people call her an old maid ? She was Mr. Arundel Raby's wife I was almost sure ; but then why did she call herself Miss Hastings ? I was puzzled by that. Again, I was puzzled by Mr. Raby's sudden appearance. He did not look so very ill. He was able to get up and walk. How did he come to the castle ? I did not think it possible that a carriage could arrive and I know nothing about it. Then how had a grand gentleman come to see my aunt, and I had heard no word of his coming, and no sound of wheels or horses ? Then the strange region in which I had seen such wonders !—Was it fairyland ? *That* puzzled me more than anything else, and I began to fancy the whole thing was nothing but an invention of my own. The vision grew fainter and fainter, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW FRIEND.

WHEN I awoke the next morning, my aunt was moving about softly, as usual, completing her ordinary toilette. It was a very different costume from the one I had seen, or dreamed I had seen her wear on the previous evening. The plain white morning gown, and the lace cap tied beneath the chin—the apron of black silk—these were common-place adornments for a lady of romance. This was my aunt Margaret, Miss Hastings. Was this the stately dame of my beautiful vision?

She approached my bed with a smile. "What makes you stare at me so, Frank? What are you thinking of?"

I blushed and cast down my eyes.

"What is the matter? Have you done or thought anything wrong, my dear?"

"Yes," I faltered. And then, unable to hide my secret longer, I told her all. I shall not forget the perplexed expression of her countenance.

"I am sorry you listened at a door, and peeped through a keyhole, Frank. But I see you are ashamed of having done so. No honest person ever does such things—much less a boy who hopes one day to become a true gentleman."

"But, aunt, dear aunt, I forgot that I *was* peeping and prying. Everything was so wonderful and beautiful! I could not take away my eyes. It was like a part of 'King Arthur.' And, aunt, you looked just like Queen Guenever!"

My aunt coloured and laughed a little. "That is no compliment. She was a bad woman. She told lies and deceived her husband."

"But she was beautiful, aunt; and grand, and stately. Like you last night."

"But I am not beautiful, Frank; though you think so because you love me."

"Aunt!"—and I hesitated. "The gentleman who was with you last night"—and I looked at the picture—"he thinks you beautiful, too,

because he loves you. I know by the way he looked at you last night."

My aunt glanced at the picture in some little confusion.

"Are you his wife, aunt?" I asked.

She turned her head quickly to me and said, "No, my love."

"Are you going to be married to him, aunt?"

She became pale, and bending over me, kissed my cheek gently, and said very softly, "No, my love."

"Aunty, dear," said I, kissing her, and trying to see her eyes—they were filled with tears—"why are you not going to be married to him? Would he not like to have you for a wife? I think he would."

My aunt now spoke in a low, firm tone, which was calculated to make me obey her commands. "You must not ask these questions, Frank. I cannot answer them, because you could not understand what I should have to say to you. You will see Mr. Arundel Raby to-day, and perhaps often again; but you must remember not to ask *him* such questions;—you must not ask François, or Susan, or Joyce."


“ Why not, aunt ?”

“ Because I wish you not to do so. If you love me as much as I think you do, you will restrain your curiosity upon this matter, because I tell you to do so. You are not old enough to understand the reasons why.”

“ Aunt, I will do exactly as you say. I will not ask any questions about it. But you know I cannot help thinking and guessing. I think and guess about everything I don't understand.”

She smiled. “ I dare say you do. But I would advise you to think and guess as little as possible about this, because the more you think and guess the less you will understand ; until you are very many years older.”

I then began to ask questions, which were not interdicted, concerning the identity of the gentleman I had seen last night with the original of the picture, and was soon satisfied on that point. It was the same person, about twenty years older. Then I inquired as to the place in which I had seen that splendid vision. To my amazement, I found it was the large conservatory which Joyce would never allow me to enter. My



aunt promised to take me into it that very morning. I then asked her when and how Mr. Raby had come to the castle; and my aunt explained to me that he always lived at the castle; that he had been there ever since I came; but that he had been very ill and unable to move from his own set of rooms, which were at the other end of the south corridor."

"But why did nobody tell me that?" I asked.

"Because nobody likes to talk of Mr. Raby's illness."

"Is it very painful?" I asked, with the natural shrinking of a child from physical torture.

"Very painful, Frank. More painful than any illness you ever saw. You must not remind him of it, now he is well. We must all help him to forget it."

"I would not speak of it for the world!" I exclaimed. "Poor Mr. Raby! Shall I see him to-day? I will be very quiet and not disturb him, and do just what he bids me! I love him already, aunty!"

"Yes, you will see him to-day. . Now that

he is better he will like to see you. He is fond of children ; and he has heard from François that you are a good little boy."

"Oh ! François. Yes, I saw him last night, too. He is Mr. Raby's servant, I suppose ?"

"Not a servant. He has lived with him all his life. François is very fond of Mr. Raby. Now make haste and dress. You may put on your pretty blue tunic to-day, as you are going to pay a visit to Mr. Raby. I will come back for you presently, and we will go down to breakfast together."

Here was the mystery cleared up, and my conscience lightened by this little conversation with my aunt. And what fresh sources of delight were opening for me ! I should see that beautiful man whose face had haunted me so long. Perhaps, if I took pains to please him, he might like me ; and I felt a glow of pleasure at the thought. How kind my aunt had been when I told her about my prying and listening ! I felt quite ashamed of it, and made a vow that I would never be tempted to peep through a keyhole any more ;—it was so disgraceful. I hoped she would not tell Mr. Raby, or François, or Susan. I did not mind *her* knowing it ; she would be sure never

to tell me of it again, unkindly. Then, there was that wonderful conservatory to be seen; and I felt a little boyish malice at thus triumphing over Joyce and his ally, Maddox. I was very happy that morning till, as I fastened the blue tunic, which I had not worn since my mother put it on, my thoughts suddenly reverted to her. How long it was since I had seen her! Dear, kind mamma! I was vexed when I thought how very little she had been in my memory during these happy weeks at Carleton, and was astonished to think that I could have forgotten her, and old Sarah too. When my aunt returned to the chamber, she found me with a troubled countenance and tearful eyes. With her usual sweetness she entered into my grief, and endeavoured to soothe it and heal my self-inflicted wounds.

“Oh, aunt, I am so glad you think we may love anybody very much and not be thinking of them always. It would be shocking to forget mamma because I have begun to love you;—I mean, to love her less. I hope I shall know a great many people to love. It makes one feel so happy to love anybody;—and so good, too. I should never do wrong things, I think, if I were always with people I love

very, very much. Do you know, aunt," I continued, as she led me out of the room, "I feel as if I were going to love Mr. Raby—really love him—not just a little, but as much as ever I can; so that I shall not like to think about leaving him and you, though I do want to see mamma and papa."

She stooped and kissed my forehead. "I hope you will love him; it will make him glad. We are going to breakfast with him now."

We entered a beautiful breakfast-room, which I had not seen before, as it belonged to the suite of rooms occupied by Mr. Raby. My aunt gave me leave to look about me, while she busied herself at the table in preparing breakfast. Presently she rang a little silver bell, and François appeared. I ran up to my old friend, and shouted "*Bon jour, mon vieux!*" as he had taught me to do, and added as usual, "*embrasse-moi.*" François seemed a little embarrassed, but was evidently glad to see me, and smiled, and nodded, and kissed me. "*Bon jour, bon jour, mon petit! Ah! tu es content de venir déjeuner avec Madame Hastings et milor! Et moi, madame,*" he said, addressing himself to my

aunt, "*j'en suis content aussi; ça fait du bien d'être avec les enfans; ça amuse beaucoup. Ils sont si bons si innocents, les enfans !*"

Nothing could be more respectful than old François manner, and yet nothing could be more unlike the manner of an English footman, or valet. His service was not mere eye or lip service; it was the service of affection. He loved Mr. Raby heartily, and my aunt he loved and revered almost as much. When I grew up, I learned to appreciate at its proper value François' judgment of, and conduct to, my aunt. He was a noble old fellow! Indeed, he had a right to the term noble, in more senses than one, for he had a *De* to his name, and was the youngest son of a younger brother of a good family in Picardy, that had once been possessed of an estate as well as of a title. François de Merville was bound to the family of the late Earl of Carleton by certain obligations, which as a man and a gentleman he felt that he could not, if he would, cut asunder; and he devoted his best years to the service of Mr. Arundel Raby. But I shall have more to communicate to the reader on this subject hereafter; in the mean time, I must record what followed François'

appearance on my aunt's summons. They spoke in French, which had better be translated.

"Is Mr. Arundel ready to come to breakfast?"

"Yes, madam; he waits for you. In the mean time he gives orders to Maddox."

"Go and tell him I am here. Say also that I have brought my little nephew with me."

François goes out, smiling and nodding at me. A few moments elapse, in which I ask various questions about the novelties in the room, which my aunt answers less attentively than usual; then the door opens—and the figure of Mr. Arundel Raby was before us. I looked up at him in mute admiration, much as I was in the habit of looking at his picture; and he looked down at me, as I fancied the picture looked in return. His dress was black. The coat was long and loose, made of rich velvet, without any embroidery or unnecessary appendage, and hung in graceful folds. It gave him a picturesque appearance; although, if he had worn that ugliest of earthly garments, a dress-coat, he would have looked graceful and majestic. Mr. Raby wanted no aid from art to show that he was

unlike, and in many things, superior to other men ; yet the tailor's art, which had been exercised to suit his convenience, tended to increase his personal distinction, and to give him a striking individuality, without giving anything eccentric or fantastic to his appearance, which he would have considered as a mark of bad taste. In this bright morning light I could see that he was very pale and thin,—that the wild, bright eyes which had so fascinated me in the picture, were as large and bright as ever ; but they seemed to be much more deeply sunken in his head, and to have become full of sadness. However, they smiled kindly on me—so kindly, that I felt drawn towards him, and before he had been a minute in the room—before he had spoken a word—I advanced boldly and put my little hand into the one he held out towards me. The smile brightened, and a slight tinge of red came over the pale cheek. He bent his head, so that he might look better at me, and said,

“What is your name, my dear child ?”

“Francis Hastings.”

“Francis !—Ah ! that is a very good name. So you have come to take breakfast with me.”

And seating himself near my aunt at the table, he placed me on his knee, and began to examine my features. "I am looking for the resemblance which François says is so strong."

"Do you see it?" she asked.

"Certainly! It is very striking. Can you account for it in any way?"

"I think I can. Do you remember several years ago, when I wished to have a set of the family pictures for myself, I sent your portrait and the earl's to my brother to get copied in London by W——. James was so afraid that any accident should happen to the pictures, that he would not allow them to go out of his house; and instead of sending them away, he invited the artist to come and copy them there. My sister-in-law did not quite approve of this intrusion on her household; especially as she was obliged to give up her favourite sitting-room to the artist, because it had a northern light. Good Mr. W—— and the two portraits troubled poor Clara sorely; though I am told she admired the pictures as much as she disliked the painter. Indeed, your brother made some way into her heart; for this little fellow," laying her hand on my head, "who came into the world about

the time the copies were completed, was named after him, at her particular request. To be perfectly honest, though, I ought to tell you my own conviction that she made that request quite as much to avoid having her boy christened Josiah (after a rich old uncle who wished to be his godfather), as from any romantic admiration for the *beaux yeux* of Francis, seventh Earl of Carleton.—It was the other portrait that made the deepest impression on her fancy, if we are to judge by the child's likeness to it."

"Nay!" said Mr. Raby. "He is very much like Frank, too. Look at this turn of the forehead;" and he put back the hair from my temples. "Why! Frank's own children have not that peculiarity so strongly marked. I can see also that you are right, and that he is like me—or rather like my portrait—like what I once was. A stranger seeing him in this house would not hesitate to say, 'There is a thorough Raby face!' And yet, Margaret, he has something about him which reminds me strongly of you. He is like the Hastings' family, too; for your father had just such eyes. What a strange thing is this likeness of one human being to another! One would

like to arrive at some satisfactory theory on the subject."

"Yes," replied my aunt. "Do you know all that Lavater says on this subject?"

"No; and I do not wish to know—unless, indeed, you think it particularly satisfactory."

"It is anything but satisfactory to my mind. There is one thing in physiognomical resemblance I feel tolerably certain about, though Lavater did not help me to the conviction; I arrived at it by means of my own unassisted genius. It is this: that whenever there is a physical resemblance between two individuals there is a corresponding mental resemblance."

Mr. Raby put his arm round me and pressed his lips to my forehead, murmuring, "Poor child! That would be a sad faith to hold."

"I believe Frank will grow up to be a good, brave, and wise man." And my aunt looked steadily at me. I was looking at her and devouring every word they uttered.

"Oh! aunty, that is just what I want to be! Do you really believe that if I try hard to cure all my faults, and to learn all I can, I shall ever become a great man?"

"You will become what *I* call a *great* man, Frank ; that is, a thoroughly good man ; one who never leaves off trying to be better."

"Aunt ! don't you think we should be good and great if we always lived with good and great people—people who talk and think about good, and great, and beautiful things ?"

"It would help us very much, at all events, to become wise and virtuous, my boy," said Mr. Raby, looking at me curiously.

"I wish !" I exclaimed vehemently ; and then stopped, and coloured deeply.

"What do you wish ? Say it out, my dear. Your aunt and I would like to know what you wish so eagerly."

"I wish I could live with aunt Margaret and you in this beautiful castle till I am grown up ! I do think then I should be a good, and brave, and wise man ! That is what I was thinking of."

Mr. Raby turned with a triumphant look to my aunt. "There, Margaret, do I need a better advocate ? Does not the oracle speak plainly ? Surely you cannot misinterpret it."

My aunt looked at me for a moment ; but made no reply.

"And so, my boy," said Mr. Raby, stroking

my hair gently, "you would like to come and live with me and aunt Margaret always, and be our little boy?"

"Yes—*No!*"—I added hurriedly, correcting myself—"not *always*. I cannot leave papa and mamma, and Tom and Harry and Lucy. I love them so much, and mamma would be very unhappy to lose me."

My aunt looked pleased, but said nothing. Mr. Raby, too, looked pleased, and said: "But if papa and mamma wished you to live here?"

"But they never *would* wish it. They love me very much. No. I should like to stay a long time with you, and—I do love aunt very, very much. I can't tell *how much*; but I love my mamma and papa more than all the world. I would not be *your* little boy, even." And I looked boldly up at him.

"What, not if I were to give you a beautiful castle as large and fine as this, and aunt Margaret were to live with us always,—and you were to have plenty of money to go to Italy, and see all the best pictures in the world, and learn to paint pictures yourself?" And his deep bright eyes smiled as they searched my face. How my heart bounded

at such a glorious idea ! But I had cast down my eyes, and they remained fixed on the floor, while a struggle went on within me. When I looked up, my aunt was laying her hand on Mr. Raby's arm, while a strange melancholy smile played on her lips as she whispered the words, "Tempter ! Again !"

"Hush !" he whispered in the same tone ; "young as he is I have faith in him. He is of your blood. I, too, believe that a certain mental resemblance accompanies physical likeness. His mouth is like yours. See ! the soft upper lip is getting firm. Well ! if you have all these things, Frank, and aunt Margaret will live with you always, and help you to be a good, brave, and wise man, will you come and be my son ?"

I had made up my mind now ; and answered steadily—"No, I will not leave my mamma and papa. I cannot. If you please, aunt Margaret, I must go home. I ought to love my home better than this fine castle. How can I be a good boy and learn to do what the Catechism says, while I stay here ?—How can I do my duty in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call me ?" I felt very strong at that moment, and sliding

down from Mr. Raby's knee, I went up to my aunt. I said—"If you please, aunt, send me home. I love to be here; but I must go home." I saw the tears in her eyes.

"Are you satisfied now, Margaret, that your nephew is worthy to be my heir? Do you not acknowledge, now, that he has his patent of nobility direct from Heaven? Do not hinder me in my attempt to make such a creature as useful in his generation as I have been useless. God in his wisdom denied me the blessing of wife and children. If I may not call you wife, let me have that child for my heir. He is your nearest kin. Look up, my Margaret! Look at the boy's face. There is virtue as well as innocence there. If at his age he can rule over his own spirit—can resist temptation and renounce a pleasure within his grasp, because his heart says it is right to do so, and not because he is lured by any hope of reward—if he can do that now, is there not every reason to believe that he will be a fit person to rule over others when he is a man? Is not the struggle to do right affectingly beautiful in so young a creature? Surely, surely, 'of *such* are the kingdom of Heaven!' Not of all children can that be

said; for most of them are selfish and thoughtless."

He paused. My aunt did not speak, and he went on—"I have watched this child frequently. I have overheard his innocent, intelligent prattle with François. I have seen him alone in his play. He has the stamp of goodness and unconscious nobility. There is nothing ignoble about him. Were I to search through the world I could not find a more promising child. Margaret, there is no good reason why I should not adopt him as my heir."

"Will not the world see in your adoption of my nephew rather a proof that you are the dupe of a mercenary, designing woman, than that she is one whom you ought to honour?"

"I will force the world to honour you as you deserve. My own family are ready to assist me."

"Better leave me alone in my obscurity, Arundel. The world will not be willing to honour those who care not, or seem not to care, for its laws. Could the world's honour, — could wealth — high station, — make me happier than I am, think you? To say that I am *happy* would be nonsense. There are

very few of us sent here to be happy; but I would not change my lot for that of any woman on earth. Am I not rich in affection? What care I for the ceremonious honour of a crowd of strangers, when I know that I have the respect and esteem of all those who know what my life has been—at least, what I have striven to make it? While Lord and Lady Carleton and my brother James give me their approbation, what can I suffer from the observations of unloving relations or of strangers upon my conduct? The motives of this conduct they cannot understand. I take part with this good, self-denying boy. He had better go home ere he acquire tastes and habits not consonant with his station.”

Mr. Raby looked very pale; and I remember putting out my hand to him and saying, “Don’t be unhappy. They will let me come and see you. I will tell mamma that you are very ill sometimes, and then she will be sure to let me come.”

At that moment François opened the door, seemingly in some dispute with a person outside. “*Mais c’est impossible!* You cannot enter *par ici*. I will announce to madame,” he said, in a suppressed tone of indignation.

“But there is not a moment to be lost, I tell you, Mounseer! I must see Mrs. Hastings and Master Frank. I tell you there’s life and death in the matter!”

I knew the voice of the woman who spoke. It was that of Sarah, my nurse. What had Sarah come for? To fetch me home, perhaps. Strange inconsistency of human nature! I now shrank from the fulfilment of my late request, and dreaded to go home;—not from apprehension of the true meaning of her hurried words, but from regret at leaving this beautiful—too beautiful—world at Carleton. I drew closer to my aunt, while Mr. Raby turned towards the door and inquired of François what was the cause of the disturbance.

Sarah was a person of authority at home, and was not disposed to be kept out when she had a mind to come in; therefore, while François was about to explain, she pushed past him, and with a flushed and agitated face stood before us. She curtsied to my aunt and Mr. Raby; but when I ran up to her she sank on the nearest chair and burst into tears.

My aunt was alarmed, and rising from her

seat, put her hand on the poor woman's shoulder.

"You have brought bad news, Sarah. What is it?—My brother?"

"No, no.—My mistress!—my mistress!"

"Is she ill?"

"Dying!—dying! The doctor says she can't live three days."

"She wants to see her child?"

"Yes, yes! Bless him. Poor dear boy! my precious darling!" And here the good woman kissed me vehemently. I understood that my mother was ill—dying; and I began to weep bitterly. "My mistress wants to see you, too, ma'am. Master hopes you will come. He had no time to write."

"I will go." She glanced for a moment at Mr. Raby.

"Certainly. You had better go with the child. Don't delay a moment. Let Frank stay with me while you prepare for your departure."

I had left off sobbing. The beating of my heart had ceased. The first cold, dark feeling of misery—immense, unknown, inevitable, irremediable—was overshadowing me.—Dying! My mother was dying! What was it to die?

What was it to have any one we love, die? *To be dead* meant to be buried in the damp, cold ground of the churchyard—that I knew; and *to be dead* meant to be gone away to God—I knew that, too. Was it, indeed, true that *mamma* was going away, so that I never should see her any more? What should I do without her? Oh! if I could only see her, and tell her how much I loved her! Surely I should see her once more! Sarah said something about three days! While these painful feelings were torturing my heart, I felt myself raised gently from the ground in Mr. Raby's arms, and with my head resting on his breast, he walked up and down the room, soothing me with soft words and gentle caresses. They opened my heart, and I poured out my pent-up feelings. He pressed me closer to his heart, and his words of comfort had a powerful effect. "The doctors had said she would not live, but they might be mistaken. It might please God to let her live. If it did not, it was best for her to go away to a happier world. God always did what was best for us, though we might not like it at the time. It was our duty to bear all the troubles He sent to us humbly and bravely." All this, and

more, to the same effect, he said. I drank in all that fell from those lips ; I promised to be a good boy, and think of what he had said, and bear the worst patiently, because it would be God's will.

When Susan came to dress me for the journey I was lying calm, though tearful, in the arms of my new friend.

"May I ever come here again and see you ?" I asked, as he lifted me into the carriage.

"I hope so, my dear," he said. Then he looked at my aunt. "Tell James all that I wish. If he thinks with you, still let him remember, that, for this child of his, he will always find a friend in his old playmate, Arundel Raby. God bless you !—You can write a letter, Frank. Write to me, and tell me how your mother is."

CHAPTER VII.

MY FIRST AFFLICTION.

EVERY one who has lost his mother in manhood feels the pathetic truth which the poet Gray has put into a few simple words—*"We can have but one mother."* Other affections may be replaced, but a mother's love—where shall we find a substitute for that? I was too young when I lost mine to understand the full meaning, or half the meaning, of the term "mother's love." I only knew that she—the sun of our home—round whom all lesser bodies revolved, and from whom they received light and warmth—she, our guide and comforter, our joy, and trust, and admiration—who seemed to me almost omnipotent and omniscient—the perfection of beauty—who could do no wrong—that she was gone away for ever.

I remember little about my journey home. I was more capable of grief than most children of my age; and I grieved terribly during the long, long weary drive,—for grief is terrible when we know not *what* it is that is about to fall upon us and all dear to us. Still the thought of Mr. Arundel Raby was a fixed source of consolation. I felt as if I could bear anything that he told me I ought to bear. I rested my head on my aunt's breast, and tried to recollect all he had said to me. My aunt leaned back in the chaise and read out of a little book. I saw these words on the back—"De Imitatione Christi."

I was present when my mother died. She held me folded in her arms, and I heard the last words she uttered. They were of anxiety for me, her youngest child. My aunt promised to aid my father in watching over my health. She spoke then of Mr. Arundel Raby's desire to adopt me, and her words pleased my poor mother. She urged my father to consider the proposal. "It will help all our children forward in life. If *you* should be taken, what will become of them?"

I remember my father promised to consider well what Mr. Arundel asked; and then he

spoke of the great God, who is the father of the fatherless. My mother seemed comforted by his words. I was the only witness of their last parting. Of that I cannot speak.

I was removed from her arms without knowing that it was a corpse I clung to so fondly.

* * * * *

About a week afterwards, my aunt, who stayed with us for a short time after our family affliction, asked me to fulfil my promise and write to Mr. Raby. She wished to give me some occupation that would distract my mind a little from the gloomy household.

It was much less trouble to me to write than it is to most children. I showed an early love of scribbling. Next to reading, my favourite in-door amusement had been writing letters to my mother about anything that interested me, on any scrap of paper I could lay my hands on.

During my stay at Carleton I used to write a little to her every day, and when I had filled two sheets of paper my aunt used to send them off to her by post. I tell the reader this, not to prove that I was an accomplished letter-writer at eight years old—for I wrote

badly and spelt worse—but to account for the easy way in which I set about writing a letter—a thing which few children of that age ever do without the co-operation of some grown person. I was used to the thing ; so, spreading a sheet of paper before me, I took my pen, and, in a sad up and down hand, with an eccentric use of capitals, and a total disregard of punctuation, orthography, and syntax, wrote the following letter :

“ DEAR MR. RABY,

“ I have to tell you that my Dear mamma is dead. she died three days ago. I saw her die. did you ever see anybody die It is very dredful, they let me stay in the room, and I never cried once, because aunt said it would make poor mamma unhapy. I was very miserable ; but I kept on saying over to myself some of the things you said to me, *that* kept me from crying. My mamma held me in her arms when she died, and then I do not know what happened, for I seemed to fall asleep. poor papa is very unhapy. I think he cries a great deal when Nobody sees him. He likes to have us all with him ; and this morning aunt Margaret read the Bible were

it says 'I am the resurrection and the life.' I do not understand *that*. I wish you knew my mamma, and what a dear, kind, good mamma she was. She was so glad to see me, she loved me very much. Tom and Harry have been crying a great deal, I can see. They are such kind, good brothers. I am fond of them. They and Lucy are home for their hollidays, and were going to have such fun when poor mamma fell ill. Aunt Margaret told me to write to you, and so I came out of the parlour to write this in dear mamma's dresing-room. My desk is kept there. The men have brought the coffin. I heard them in the next room. Sarah thinks that perhaps mamma's spirit is there, and heres all we say. What do you think I should like her spirit to be with me always. I do not think I should ever do rong things if I rememberd that she could see me always. But God is always with us, and he can know and see more than any angle or dead person. Dear Mr. Raby, I like writing to you; but, now I want to leve of because the tears keep making blots on the paper. Indeed, I do try not to cry, but I cannot help it when I think that my own darling mamma is dead.

Can you read this ? I dare say the writing is bad and the spelling all wrong. I will write you a better letter next time.

“ I remain, dear Mr. Raby,

“ Your dutiful and affectionate

“ Young friend,

“ FRANCIS HASTINGS.”

Some days after my mother's funeral, Mrs. Russell, a widowed sister of my father's, came to live with him and superintend his household ; and my aunt Margaret returned alone to Carleton. I was sorry to lose her, but I did not wish to leave my father, towards whom my affection seemed to have deepened wonderfully, while his love for me acquired all the fondness of my mother's. He liked to have me with him always ; even when the others went away. This was natural enough at that time, for I was the youngest and the quietest ; besides, I was my mother's darling ;— concerning whom she had shown the greatest anxiety on her death-bed.

One morning I went to his room as usual before breakfast. He was dressed and sitting by the open window, reading a letter. He took me on his knee, and after kissing me

affectionately, looked steadily in my face while he spoke as follows :—"I want to speak to you very seriously, my dear child. Do you remember Mr. Arundel Raby?"

"Oh! yes, papa. He wrote me a letter when——" I stopped, and looked away from my father. By a tacit consent we never spoke about my mother's death.

"He has written me a letter now. Can you guess what it is about?"

"About me? He would like to have me for his own little boy. He has no children to love him, papa, as you have." And I kissed him.

"Would you like to be his child, Frank?"

"No, papa. I would not like to be anybody's child but yours."

"But Mr. Raby can give you a better education than I can. He can make you rich, so that you need never go to 'the nasty, gloomy counting-house,' as you call it. You can live in a fine castle of your own, not ten miles from here, and have carriages and horses, and everything that money can buy."

"I don't care for that, papa. Why do you say all that? I love you better than all the fine things in the world."

He kissed me tenderly. "I know you do, and I would not let you be Mr. Raby's child for all the fine things in the world. So I am glad we are of the same mind. But, now there is another thing we must think of. I wish you to live with your aunt Margaret for a year, or perhaps two years, till you go to school. Your aunt cannot come and live with us, and Dr. B—— tells me you will never grow strong and tall if you live here. Aunt Margaret wishes to have you with her at Carleton, and Mr. Arundel Raby, who is a very clever scholar, offers to superintend your education there, and to have a tutor for you when you are a little older, even if I will not let him adopt you for his own son. This would be much better than your going to school for a great many years to come. You would learn a great deal more; and you would be with aunt Margaret, who would take as much care of you as——"

I knew what he meant. We looked at each other in silence.

"What do you think of that plan, my love?"

"What will you do without me, papa, dear?" And my arms went round his neck.

"I should have to do without you if you went to school. I should have to do without you in any case, my love; for you must not live here, and I am obliged to live here to attend to my business. I would rather let you go to aunt Margaret than to any one."

"I would rather be at Carleton with her and Mr. Raby than anywhere else, except at home. I love them both very much; and Carleton is such a beautiful place. It makes me so happy to be there. I often wish our home were like that. If I could come home and see you all sometimes, and if aunt Russell and Sarah will stay with you, I should like to be with aunt Margaret, if you would like me to, papa."

"I should like it, my boy; because I think it would be right. So that is settled. I don't like to see these little cheeks so pale. I shall write to Mr. Arundel and your aunt to-day, and tell them we are going to see them in three days. You must tell Sarah to have all your things ready, and on Friday morning you and I will go to Carleton Castle."

"Do you know Mr. Arundel Raby, papa?"

"Yes, I know him very well. I manage

his property here, and I knew him very well when we were boys. We were good friends then, and used to play and learn together."

"How was that, papa?"

"Do you know the Rectory in the village of Carleton? Well—my father, that is, your grandfather Hastings, was the clergyman there once. I and all my brothers and sisters were born there. I am a few years older than the earl and Mr. Arundel, and my father used to teach us all three, and your aunt Margaret and your aunt Sophia, too. So we boys used to be very intimate friends then, and we always liked each other, and do still, though we are so differently situated in life that we can very seldom meet."

"Do you know what made Mr. Raby so ill?—People seem to think he is very ill indeed."

"So he is; but I cannot explain to you exactly what is the matter with him."

"Papa! there seems to be a great deal of unhappiness in the world. Sarah told me only bad people are really unhappy. Now that can't be true, for *you* are unhappy—and aunt Margaret, who speaks so cheerfully and looks so calm and happy—she is not always glad, I

know—and then Mr. Raby—dear Mr. Raby! he is in such great suffering. All the people I love best are unhappy, and I cannot help one of them! Papa, do you know that thought makes me very unhappy too, sometimes.”

“Nay, nay! child, that should not be. If you grow up into a wise and good man, you will help every one of us to be happy. Even while you are a little boy you can make us happy, if we see you kind and unselfish and industrious, and full of thanks to God for all his blessings to you. He has given you many, my son. Is it not a great blessing to have so many kind friends and relations, and to know that by being good you will make them happy?”

“Yes, papa! but still, I wish I could make you and aunt Margaret and Mr. Arundel forget that you ever were unhappy. All grown-up people seem to have a great deal of sorrow. Now, I fancy when I am a man, and know a great deal, and can do what I like, I shall be much happier than I am now. It will be so nice to be a man, like you, papa! A little boy can do nothing! Oh! I wish I were a man!”

My father looked at me with a melancholy

smile. It would have been lost time to endeavour to make the child understand that what seemed so beautiful and desirable to him—the manhood after which his soul yearned—was not so gladsome a thing as he believed. And our conversation ended by the entrance of Lucy to summon my father to breakfast.

On the Friday morning the coach called at our door to carry away my father and me, as it had done three months before on the occasion of my first journey. There was no fond mother now to kiss me and weep at my departure. I remembered her words—“Oh! Frank, I do believe you are not at all sorry to go away from your own mother!” They hurt my heart now;—for I felt that the reproach had been just. “Oh! if she were here now I should never leave her!”—I was lifted to the top of the coach by the same guard who had put me there before. This time I showed no sign of joy. “Poor little chap!” I heard the guard say to some one. “His mother is not here to bid him ‘good-bye,’ and cry over his going away, now! Well, she’s safe from crying any more;—and his troubles are all to come!”

When we reached the castle that night, I was tired and sleepy ; but I wanted very much to see Mr. Raby before I went to bed, therefore I contrived to keep awake until my father and my aunt had talked awhile ; then I ventured to ask if I might go to see him.

"I do not know whether he can see you to-night, but we will inquire. If you are not too sleepy, go and ring the bell." My aunt wrote something on a slip of paper, and when Susan appeared, she desired her to "take that to François, and wait for an answer."

Susan soon came back with another piece of paper. My aunt read what was written on it, and turning with a smile to me, she said, "We are going to a place you will be delighted to see ; but you must not ask to stay there long to-night. Papa and I want to talk with Mr. Raby, and you must go to bed very soon after he has seen you."

"I don't mind that, aunt. But I should not like to go to bed without seeing him. Where are we going now ?" I asked, as she took a lighted taper from the mantelpiece and led me across the room.

"You shall see. Will you come, too, James ?" she said to my father. He rose and

followed her to the organ recess—to the back of the instrument—the scene of my temptation and shame. Is she going to open that door ? I thought. Yes ! She took a key from her pocket and fitted it into the lock. It was turned—the door was slowly pushed back, and there, indeed, was that Fairyland before me.—The beautiful arcade with the palms of acacias on either side, and the rich blossoms clustering below—the soft lamps hanging from above—the delicate fountain darting up into the air, and throwing itself down in diamond dust—there it was as wonderful, as incredibly beautiful as it had seemed to me before. I hesitated in the doorway. “Come in, my love ;” and as my aunt spoke I saw Mr. Raby rise from a seat near the fountain, and laying aside a large book, advance to meet us. I entered the conservatory, and in a few moments was pacing slowly up and down the mosaic pavement with my hand in my father’s, listening to the talk between him and Mr. Raby, and admiring everything I saw. After a quarter of an hour my aunt said :

“Now that you have met, you will have much to say to each other. I must leave you for a time ; I want to go away with Frank.

He and I have also a great deal to say to each other."

My father stayed at the castle during the next day; the day after that he returned home. I was alone with him just before his departure, and said (for my mind was uneasy on the subject):

"Have you told Mr. Raby that I cannot be his little boy, papa?"

"Yes, my dear; I have had a long talk with him about you. He will be very kind to you, and be a friend to you always if you are good. It makes me happy to trust you with him and your aunt, because I know that you will be better cared for than you could be at home, now. Remember while you are here you are to obey them as you would me. Mr. Raby is anxious to have you properly taught. You are to have a tutor directly. You will take pains to learn everything that Mr. Raby wishes?"

"Oh yes, papa, I shall be very glad to learn. I want to be a clever man."

"And, Frank, there is one thing more I wish to say. If anything should happen to me—if I should die.—Nay, my boy, we must all die—you must then do what aunt Margaret thinks best for you. She may think it

well that Mr. Raby should adopt you for his own child when you have neither father nor mother. But, even then, remember it is my wish that you learn to do something by which you may support yourself. You are old enough to know what *having a profession* means ; now, I wish you to have a profession, even if you are to be Mr. Raby's heir. I would like you to be a clergyman, or a physician, or a lawyer. Do you understand ?”

“ Yes, papa ; but I would not like to be a clergyman, or a physician, or a lawyer. I would like best to be a painter. Painting is a profession, too, aunt says.”

“ A painter !” exclaimed my father ; “ but, my boy, to be a painter one must have a genius for painting. I do not know that you have.”

“ I don't *know*, but I think I have. May I try ? If Mr. Arundel will let me have a drawing-master I should be, oh ! so glad.”

“ It is a good thing to know how to draw, and to understand pictures, so there can be no harm in your learning ; but I do not quite approve of your being an artist *only*. I would rather you were a clergyman. When I was a little boy, I wanted very much to be a clergy-

man, but my father could not afford to send me to a University."

"Shall I go to a University, papa?" I asked delightedly.

"Yes, my boy. If you pay attention to your studies there, you will be fitted for any position that a gentleman may occupy."

"Are *you* a gentleman, papa? Are manufacturers gentlemen?" This was a question which had forced itself into my mind lately.

"Yes, my dear. I am a gentleman by birth and education; but many manufacturers are not gentlemen. I cannot stay to talk to you any longer. The carriage will soon be here; and I have some papers to put up. You may come with me to my room."

Half an hour after that I stood on the top of one of the turrets, trying to watch the carriage that bore away my father as it wound along the road to P——.

I stood gazing at the spot where it finally disappeared, and the tears were in my eyes. Since I had lost my mother, a fear crept into my heart whenever I parted with those I loved—the fear that I might never see them again. It was natural, perhaps; but on this occasion it was so strong, that I caught hold

of a hand that was near me, and held it fast. It was that of Mr. Raby.

“What is the matter, my child?” he asked, tenderly.

“He has gone away!” I murmured. “Perhaps I may never see him any more.”

He took me in his arms, as he had done once before, and whispered words of comfort such as a childish mind could comprehend. Pillowed on that large heart, my eyes sought alternately his face, and the broad, blue sky above the turret-top;—peace came to my spirit, and that presentiment passed away.

But it was a true presentiment. I never saw my father again. Four months later he was attacked by a fever prevalent at North Ashurst among the colliers. It laid him among the dead in less than thirty-six hours. Dear, noble-hearted father! In after years I learned to know all your worth; and then I would not have exchanged my dead father for any living one. No! not for the best of that aristocratic house on which I was engrafted.

CHAPTER VIII.

ADOPTION.

WE can most of us look back to some particular year in our past life—more full of events—more pregnant with influential causes—more abundant in distinct and palpable change for the individual *me* than any other;—though, to the thinking mind, no day passes by without showing a significance in connexion with the whole of life which redeems it from the imputation of being dull and without interest. But how few of us are thinkers! Do we not, most of us, see the meaning of our years by the light of the feelings alone? Where they shed no ray, all is as if it were not. We live from one emotion to another; making our lives alternate blank and excitement of heart or sense.

The *annus mirabilis* of my life came early.

It was this same ninth year in which the events, already narrated, took place. Early in the May of that year, I left my mother for the first time, to pay a two months' visit to my unknown, dreaded aunt. That time of wonder and strange joy was stopped suddenly, when the wonder and the joy were greatest; and I was snatched away, and set down face to face with grim sorrow. My mother's death penetrated my young soul so deeply, that even my father found his little boy a companion in grief. I could not shake off the oppression of that affliction, while I remained with him, or amidst the familiar scenes which she had animated; and the physician prescribed as medicine, to both body and mind, a return to the quiet and vivifying beauty of Carleton. There my bodily health was speedily re-established; rather should I say that then I first knew what bodily health meant, for, as I have before intimated, my infancy had been for the most part sickly. It was late in September when my father took me to Carleton Castle that second time, and left me with those who were so soon to be mother,—father,—all that I was hereafter to know of parental ties on earth.

During the glorious autumn that followed, I spent nearly all my days in the open air, rambling with the gamekeeper, riding with the grooms, driving and walking with my aunt; or, what I often loved best of all, roaming about alone, and losing myself in the distant woods of the park. I felt it a blessed thing to be a child—to be in no one's way—to be a free creature, and yet well cared for. Every one about the place was familiar with "little Master Hastings." I found companions of my own age in the village and at the gamekeeper's-lodge, and everywhere my name was sufficient to ensure me a welcome. My grandfather's memory was held in high honour for several miles round, and my aunt had, in some measure, served to keep up the reputation of the family. People remembered my father, as a boy; and spoke of him with admiration and affection. This always excited my gratitude; but I can recollect that I used to feel sorry that the old people found no resemblance in me to him. They all agreed that I was "not like any Hastings of them all—except *Miss Hastings*—she that was housekeeper now," but that I was "for all the

world like the great family at the Castle.” “If Mr. Arundel Raby had an own son, he could not be more like himself than little master.” “It was a pity I was not his son,” some said; others shook their heads, and some smiled significantly, and said, “Who knows?” I listened to all the village comments on my appearance, without understanding what I have since understood by them. My feeling at the time was contradictory—part of it was pleasure—a sort of gratified pride, perhaps, that I was considered like the great aristocratic family. The other part was pain, for I was sorry not to be like my father, whom I loved so much, and who was such a brave, handsome boy as the village people described.

During that autumn, when I lived all day the life of a gipsy, rising before the sun, and starting off with some of my allies who were old enough to take care of me, and returning home at sunset, I scarcely ever opened a book. I believe my aunt, and François, and Mr. Arundel kept any book that would have a charm for me out of my way; any intellectual excitement beyond what I was sure

to gather in my walks abroad, they believed would be injurious just then. Every evening I returned exhausted, but after a good meal (how I enjoyed those simple meals!) I revived, and would relate the day's adventures to my aunt, as she reclined in her easy-chair, and I sat on a stool at her feet, within the influence of the warm glow from the great logs that crackled and flamed on the hearth; for the evenings, I remember, were chilly, and we loved to draw close to the chimney,—my aunt and I. Sometimes Mr. Arundel sat with us; but not often. I saw him in his own rooms, in the daytime; and my aunt was often there then. In the evening, after the lamp came, I seldom saw Mr. Raby; he rarely entered my aunt's parlour in the evening. I used to wonder why he kept away from us. At one time, I fancied that perhaps the doctors had ordered him to go to bed very early. Then, by some chance, I discovered that he never went to bed till very late, and it came into my head that as he was a great scholar he might be studying at night,—perhaps writing a book;—a poem, or a treatise about the stars. As well as I can enter into

Banish all disquietude on the score of beds, sheets, and provisions! Lady Carleton and my daughters are far away. I have come down, *en garçon*, for a threefold purpose; to have a conversation with Arundel—to get a few days of peace—and another few days of war among the pheasants, before the rest come to disturb the house. There will be plenty of time for you to play the housekeeper a week hence. So sit down once more as you were just now, and let me go back twenty years.—How is it that you don't get old?" he inquired, glancing curiously at her, as he sunk, apparently fatigued, into a large chair beside her.

My aunt laughed. "You must excuse me if I do not receive compliments as prettily as you pay them. I am obliged to be uncivil enough to contradict you, for I feel that I am getting old."

"Ah! your countenance was always deceitful!" he replied, smiling again. "Even in those early days at the Rectory, yonder, when your father used to say, 'Margaret, you look as if you knew nothing about this lesson! Try if you can construe better than Lord Merle!' and you always construed rightly on

purpose to spite me !—Do you remember you were always ‘Margaret,’ and I was always ‘Lord Merle’ when we were naughty ? It was ‘Meg’ and ‘Frank,’ at other times. Ah ! what would I not give now for one day—one long, long summer-day of those old times !

‘ Ah ! if in after life we could but gather
The very refuse of our childish hours !’

You smile to hear me quote poetry !—Politics give one a taste for poetry by the force of contrast. I always feel poetical at a Privy Council ; especially when —— is prosing away, *more suo*.—To return. You seem to have preserved the light and breath of those old times still—they hang about you like the perfume of the attar when the precious drops have all been drained from the bottle. I cannot accept your contradiction ; you do *not* get old ; if to be old be to lose freshness of feeling—and that sunshine of the smile which comes only from the sun within the heart—how is it that you look so like the Margaret Hastings of twenty years ago ?”

“ I should say it is because you do not see very clearly by this light. I am not decrepid, certainly ; but I am no longer young !” And

my aunt laughed, as if there was nothing melancholy in the assertion.

“No longer young!” echoed the stranger, as he looked straight into the fire. “Tell me, is there any compensation in life for being no longer young?”

“Have *you* found none?” asked my aunt, looking at him gravely. “You speak as if you really believed in that heresy of half-developed minds, that merely to be young, *i.e.* half-developed, is the highest, happiest state of the human being.—I have seen nothing so very desirable in my own youth, or in the youth of all those I love most, that I should mourn its loss. It seems the season for suffering, to all minds not contented with mediocrity and the amenities of commonplace.”

“Ah! how one suffers in youth!” exclaimed the stranger, catching at a word, and continuing to speak as if half to himself. “It is terrible to think how the heart beat and swelled, nigh to bursting then, for what seems such a trifle now. How exquisitely wretched men are at twenty! How they hug and dote on their despair; and what a vast amount of

time they have to be miserable in ! He is a lucky fellow who at forty has time for the luxury of woe ! A man finds, then, that the swift hurry, the strong pressure of events, numb his feelings—he has not time, now, for sorrow. What was that I read the other day, quoted in some review (I do not quite live on Blue Books and newspapers, Miss Hastings),—poetry that contains sound sense, on this very subject :

‘He that lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend.
Eternity mourns that. ’Tis an ill cure
For life’s worst ills to have no time to feel them.
Where sorrow’s held intrusive and turned out
There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
Nor aught that dignifies humanity.’

Still, I, for one, hold sorrow intrusive.—Out she should turn from *my* quarters, bag and baggage, if I could have my will ! No, I was not born for a philosopher, that’s clear ; I hate sorrow, even her very shadow, as much as I did when a boy !—More than *that* boy does !” he continued, glancing round at me, with his bright eyes. “Come here, youngster ! So ! you are not afraid of me ?”—and he shook me by the hand.

“ I know something about you. I saw your father two days ago. He tells me you are a good boy. When he and I were boys we were great friends, and so it is proper that you and I should be friends. Is it a bargain ?”—and he smiled. “ Oh ! but you must not look so grave, if you are to be my friend. I like my friends to laugh.” Then turning to my aunt he said : “ He is too serious. This great place is dull and gloomy to a child—when he is alone here ; *I* remember that ! He is not at all like James,” he continued, examining my features narrowly ; “ he is very much like”—we both looked at my aunt, and a colour came to her face. The stranger stopped, looked at me again, more earnestly than before—so earnestly, that *I* coloured, too. He rose hastily, throwing one more look at my aunt as he did so. She sat unmoved, and smiled at me kindly ; I went close to her chair. A sudden change seemed to have come over the stranger. He stood before the fire, looking as cross as he had just before looked pleasant.

“ Have you dined ?” asked my aunt, in the same tone as before.

“ No !—yes !—that is—I beg your pardon,

I dined on the road. And now, I will wish you good evening, Miss Hastings. I can find my way to Mr. Raby's apartments, I suppose?"

"Not without a light, I think," said my aunt. "If you will wait a minute, some one will attend you. Ring the bell, Frank."

I ran forward to do so; the stranger instantly moved in the same direction, and did what my aunt had requested. As we both came in contact, he laughed again—"Ah! I remember—your name is Frank, too!"—then seeming to recover himself, he said to my aunt: "While I think of it, Miss Hastings, let me beg your acceptance of a bundle of new music they will find among my packages; perhaps you will let me hear some of it to-morrow. I suppose you play and sing a great deal always. Music helps to keep one young. What was that you were saying just now about 'a heresy of half-developed minds?' I am naturally heretical. I believe it is a good thing to be young, for no other reason than that one is young. There is an art in keeping young, independently of that practised to such perfection by a Frenchwoman *de trente ans*—

the art which you at *quarante ans* practise equally well. Part of the secret lies in your keeping 'the cool sequestered vale of life.' "

"I think what you mean is simply this, that I live in a pure air ; are well lodged ; eat the best food ; rise early ; go to bed early ; and lead a tolerably active life, with no undue excitements. These advantages I have had for years ; as no one knows better than you."

"Ah ! Temperance !—living face to face with nature !—You ought to live for ever ; and be for ever young in such a mode of existence !"

"It is the true *savoir vivre*, I believe," said my aunt.—"Will you give your orders ? here is Susan."

"Ah ! how do you do, Susan ?" Susan dropped a profound curtsy, and said, blushing :

"Very well, thank you, my lord ; I hope your lordship is well, and my lady and the young ladies."

"We are all well, Susan. Tell Bennet to give you a bundle of music for Miss Hastings. Any room will do for me," he added, turning to my aunt ; "I beg there may be no trouble about it to-night, as I come so late. Then I

want some one to send François to me, here. And, though I have dined, I should like to have a cup of coffee when I go up to Mr. Raby's room. What! are you going to bed, my little man?" And he patted me on the head. At a signal from my aunt, I was going to leave the room with Susan. "Good night! good night! I hope we shall see more of each other to-morrow. Your father and I were great friends."

As I went away, I asked Susan who that gentleman was, and was rather astonished to hear that it was the Earl of Carleton.

"Why, Susan, you told me that the earl and countess always came down here in such grand style! and that there was always a week's preparation before they came; that the furniture in the state-rooms was all uncovered, and the carpets put down! and here is the earl come just as if he was any other gentleman—like my papa. I think he has walked from the village, instead of coming with a carriage and four horses, as you said."

"Circumstances alter cases, Master Frank. My lord is an earl, and can do just as he likes, you know. He's not a bit proud, you see; and sometimes he likes to come down in a

quiet way and take us by surprise ; and sits, quite affable, in your aunt's room, and says to me, ' Susan, how do you do ? ' But when my lady is with him they travel in style, I tell you. My lady has a fine spirit, and loves to have everything as a countess should have. When she is here, we all mind our ps and qs, you will see. My lord is very particular, too, sometimes. He ain't always as humble as he is to-night ; but keeps up his dignity, and insists on having the best and grandest of everything, as a nobleman should. Any way, he is a real, fine gentleman—kind and good to everybody. I like him with all his odd ways."

" I should like him better without them," said I.

The next evening a message came to my aunt from the earl, begging that she would send me to him and Mr. Raby for half an hour. I was immediately carried off by Susan to have some alteration made in my costume, which I considered quite unnecessary ; having now arrived at that period when a boy looks upon dressing as an invention of the evil one.

" Why can't I go as I am ? " I remonstrated. " What's the good of putting on a clean collar and all that rubbish ? "

"Fie, Master Hastings!" exclaimed Susan. "Look at these dirty little paws! Are they fit for Mr. Raby or my lord to touch, do you think? Ah! you used to be a very nice clean little gentleman—you're quite altered since you've been allowed to go scampering about, and climbing trees, and getting into mud and dirt with all the tag-rag and bob-tail! I wonder your aunt allows it. I can't abear such ways! It ain't at all genteel. There you are! not minding a bit what I say! Now, stand still, there's a good boy, and let me comb out your hair. You never keep that tidy now. It's just as bad as any other young gentleman's; and it used to look as beautiful as print. Ah! Master Hastings you are turning just like all other boys! Stand still, sir! There, now you look as a little gentleman should! Don't go flying along the corridor like mad; and whatever you do, don't keep poking your tiresome little fingers up into your curls. They look very nice now!" And she dismissed me with a kiss of approval for submitting to that most painful sacrifice of a little boy's life, the sacrifice to the Graces—and the kiss was followed by a sigh for my defalcation from my old habitual worship of

that fair triad. She watched my progress along the south corridor, to make sure that I did not disorder my curls by running; and nodded kindly to me when I laid my hand on the lock of the door which communicated with Mr. Arundel's apartments. Good Susan! She was rather more anxious about the visit I was about to pay than I was myself.

In the ante-room I found François musing over the fire. "Pauvre petit!" he murmured, as I went up to him; and he kissed me in his French fashion on both cheeks.

"I have come to see the earl and Mr. Arundel," I said; "they have sent for me. Am I to go in there?"—and I pointed to the door of Mr. Arundel's study.

"Oui, oui, mon ami," he said, softly, but so mournfully, that I asked,

"Is there anything the matter, François? Is Mr. Arundel ill again?" And I believe I turned pale with a vague fear of that unknown disease.

"Non, non! milor se trouve très bien. Vas, mon petit!—go to him. Je vais t'ouvrir la porte." He rose, and opening the door, I passed into the room.

My attention was immediately drawn to

the two brothers, as they stood side by side before the fire. Now that I saw the earl divested of over-coats and attired in a dressing-gown of dark red velvet, which hung around him in ample folds, I was struck by the dignity of his appearance. He was a very handsome man, in the prime of life; but not much like his picture, except about the eyes. They still retained somewhat of their sunny, joyous light; but the other features were prouder, harder, stronger;—there was the look of a sovereign, it might be of a tyrant, in the haughty but refined upper lip. The face was capable of much variety in expression. Sometimes it was stern;—at other times sad;—often sarcastic;—seldom tender;—most frequently it wore that look of anxiety and care for some mere earthly interest which is so common among men of high station in the world;—a look very different indeed from the grave and earnest one seen in the faces of men whose minds are habitually filled with lofty thoughts having nothing selfish for their basis. The Earl of Carleton had lived in and for the world, but he had a soul which the world could not satisfy; nor, in consequence, make entirely its own. He was high in office, and

honoured among men. His ambition grew by what it fed on; but I have seen him look, and that not seldom, as if he were saying to himself, "What profit hath a man of all the labour that he taketh under the sun!" But he never gave the thought words; and acted always as if it had never entered into his heart. He had the power to crush misgivings and regrets. Intellectually the Earl of Carleton was, if not a giant, a well-trained athlete, and delighted in exercise. He had a vein of humour, which came out occasionally in conversation. He was considered a good talker; and though, from all I can learn, he was given to contemptuous sarcasm against women, there was not a man in London more *fêted* by them. Judging from my own observation, I should say that Lord Carleton had a natural liking for cultivated female society; at all events, he shone brilliantly in it, for all his *poco curanteism*. His tastes were not simple; though he loved simplicity by way of change, it then assumed the form of a luxury. Inactivity was not congenial to him, but sometimes he would take to idleness and repose, as a man surfeited with the taste of costly wines will call for pure water; but

he is sure to go back to the wine again. Thus it was that Lord Carleton sometimes came down suddenly, and without any parade, to spend a few days at his ancestral seat, and took pleasure in putting up with inconveniences which, in general, he would think it impossible to submit to. He was a disappointed man. He had no son, and his brother had none.

One of the things that made me like Lord Carleton, long before I was old enough to make these observations on his character, was his strong attachment to his brother. The friendship between them was of a powerful and peculiar nature, and will be spoken of hereafter; but I remember being impressed by many evidences of it on the earl's part, during the evening which I am reverting to, but the memory of which is so painful that I shrink from it. As it was of importance to the story I have undertaken to relate, I must give the reader a brief account of what occurred then.

The two brothers stood side by side in front of the fire; looking very like their pictures I thought. Mr. Raby made a motion to me to approach; but I missed the usual smile in his

face. He looked very grave—and so did the earl. I gazed wistfully up into Mr. Arundel's face. "There is something the matter," I thought. "He looked at me *so* when mamma——" I could not go on with the thought; my eyes fell to the ground, and I felt a mist come over them.

"Is he very sensitive?" I heard a voice say, as if in a dream. It was the earl who spoke.

"Yes, poor child!" said Mr. Raby; and I felt myself drawn towards him. He had taken a seat. I tried to rouse myself, and stood still, waiting for what was coming; but I did not guess what it was.

"My dear child, you suspect—you feel that I have some bad news to tell you. Will you try and bear it like a brave boy? Will you help your aunt to bear it?"

I nodded my head quickly;—my fingers played nervously with a portion of my dress.

"Your dear father has been seized with sudden illness, and is dead."

"Dead!"—the word faded away in my throat, and I sank into Mr. Arundel's arms in a state of stupefaction. How long I remained thus I know not—probably some hours. I believe I slept.

On opening my eyes again, I saw a man sitting at a table, with his head bowed down upon his arms;—his frame shook as if he were weeping. I looked again;—it was not Mr. Raby—it was the earl!—That proud, haughty, strong man was weeping. I heard a sob, which made by heart leap. “It is for my father he weeps!” I thought. “He said he was his friend!” There came another agonising convulsive sob. I had never seen grief so passionate. It awoke a yearning pity, and I felt that I must comfort him. There was no one else in the room. I rose, trembling with emotion, and creeping across the room, stood beside the mourner for a minute, not daring to breathe. Again came that awful sob. I could contain my pity and sympathy no longer; but, putting my arms round his neck, I kissed his cheek, and spoke a few childish words.

“Don’t cry so!—Pray don’t!”

He started as if an adder had stung him; and looked at me with pain-racked face. I flung myself passionately into his arms. “Don’t send me away! Let me cry with you. You loved my poor papa!”

He pressed me to his breast.—“God knows

I did, my poor child ! There ! there ! cry as much as you like. Never mind me. Poor young heart !” And he kissed me as affectionately as if I had been his own child. In a minute or two he was calm—all emotion disappeared, except that his lips were pale and his eyes haggard. I had attributed his grief to a single cause—the death of his friend. I know now that it had other and equally potent causes. In mature life our feelings and passions are seldom unmixed—they are strangely complicated, reminding the fanciful philosopher of those hybrid creations of former ages—sphinxes, and monsters, and chimeras dire. Like them they are more powerful and horrible than any simple terror or grief—tearing the soul many ways at each wound.

While Lord Carleton was trying to console me, and answering all my questions concerning the manner of my father’s death (which need not be repeated here), Mr. Raby entered the room. There was a bright colour in his hollow cheek, and the eyes gleamed under their drooping lids. Immediately his brother rose, and putting me gently from him, advanced and took his hand. Mr. Raby raised

his eyelids for a moment. They remained silent. At last the earl said, in a subdued voice, "How is she?"

"She is——there is no one like that woman, Francis! To see her as I have seen her, just now, would move the hardest men to love and pity! I envy James the sorrow she feels for him."

"*You?* You surely ought not to envy—the dead. Does she show much grief?"

"She is a thorough woman, and affects no unnatural stoicism.—She weeps."

"Poor Margaret! Can anything be done for her?"

"No; she is alone now. I thought it best to leave her awhile. I have promised to take the child to her presently. She bade me show you the letter which James dictated an hour before his death. There it is. You will see that it is such as to overcome all her scruples. To-morrow or the next day this matter must be attended to, as far as the legal part of it is concerned; for the rest, she says that it would be a satisfaction to her if you will tell her your opinion to-night."

"To-night? In her present state! Don't let her think of it to-night. It will excite

her too much!" replied the earl, who had glanced over the letter.

"I think it may have a contrary effect. If she were to hear from your own lips that you do not object to my adoption of her nephew—that you approved of my choice—it would set her mind at ease. Her scruples are delicate, and very natural."

"Very natural in such a woman! I can see, too, that she would wish no time to be lost in the business, if it be to be done. We know not what a day may bring forth. Remember Morton's interest in this matter. The sooner the boy is made your legal heir the better."

"Your evidence and co-operation are necessary to ensure his right. My will is not good in law without your testimony, you remember. I will have no chance of Morton's interference with the boy."

He went on to speak of technicalities which I could not understand, though I knew they related to my being made his heir. My father's letter was in Lord Carleton's hand, as it hung down by his side. I felt an irresistible desire to press to my lips a paper which my dying father had touched. I bent my head and kissed it.

"Take it, my child," said Mr. Arundel. "You may read it if you can." While they went on conversing about wills and title-deeds I read that letter.

It made a profound impression upon me. It was addressed to my aunt, and contained an earnest entreaty that she would lose no time in complying with Mr. Raby's desire to make me his heir. He referred to a correspondence which had recently taken place between them, and also to an interview he had had with his old friend, the Earl of Carleton, on this subject. He was now quite convinced that his former scruples were rather the result of pride than of prudence. Lord Carleton had expressed his determination to acknowledge and make good in law the claims of any person whom his brother should desire to adopt as his heir. He had said that, as there were no sons in his own family, he would rather that his brother's choice should fall upon a Hastings than on any other. He had promised to support and assist the child of his old friend in his new position. As to Mr. Arundel,—my father spoke with perfect confidence of his love for me, and with gratitude for all his intentions in my favour. He

prayed that I might prove worthy of them—that I might be an honour to my new station. Above all, he hoped that I should never forget my duty to my own family—least of all, to her who now stood in the place of my mother. In after years I studied that letter. At the time when I first read it I was so occupied with the sad thought of the writer's death, that I gathered only a very general idea of its meaning. I was to be Mr. Arundel's *heir*; that was all I understood distinctly. Heir to what, I knew not. Heritage was nothing to me then, sonship was everything.

“Do you understand that letter, my boy?” asked Mr. Raby, when I had laid it on the table.

“Yes. Papa says I am to be your son, now. But what will become of Tom, and Lucy, and Harry? I want to see them. I want to be with them. Who will be their father, now?”

I was soon satisfied on this point. They were well taken care of, and I was to see them soon.

“May I go to my aunt?” I asked, with that longing which a sorrowful child always has to rest his head upon a woman's bosom.

Those two men were very kind, but they did not caress me as my aunt would have done. She loved me as women only love a child; she was weeping for my father, and I could weep with her. I was sent to my aunt. I sat down on the little stool at her feet, laid my head in her lap, and, after awhile, cried myself to sleep. She sat in her chair before the fire, motionless.

I awoke with the sound of voices near me. The earl and Mr. Raby were talking with my aunt. It was about me: my being made some one else's son, and my own father was dead! It seemed like disrespect to his memory. I did not like to listen to it. Presently my aunt lifted me in her arms, and laid me on that very sofa where my father had placed me the first night I came to Carleton Castle. That night returned vividly to my memory, and I fancied I heard my father's voice as I had heard it then, in conversation with my aunt. But *her* tones! How different they were now! When I looked at her face, and heard her voice, I saw how deeply she loved and mourned for my father. She sat at the table with the two brothers; they spoke in low tones. The earl wrote something on a

sheet of paper, and then my aunt wrote on it, and then Mr. Arundel. It was then folded and given to my aunt by the earl, who said, "That is settled, now. I will see Morton and the lawyers to-morrow. Are you quite satisfied?"

"I am. You are very good. God bless you both." And she stretched a hand to each.

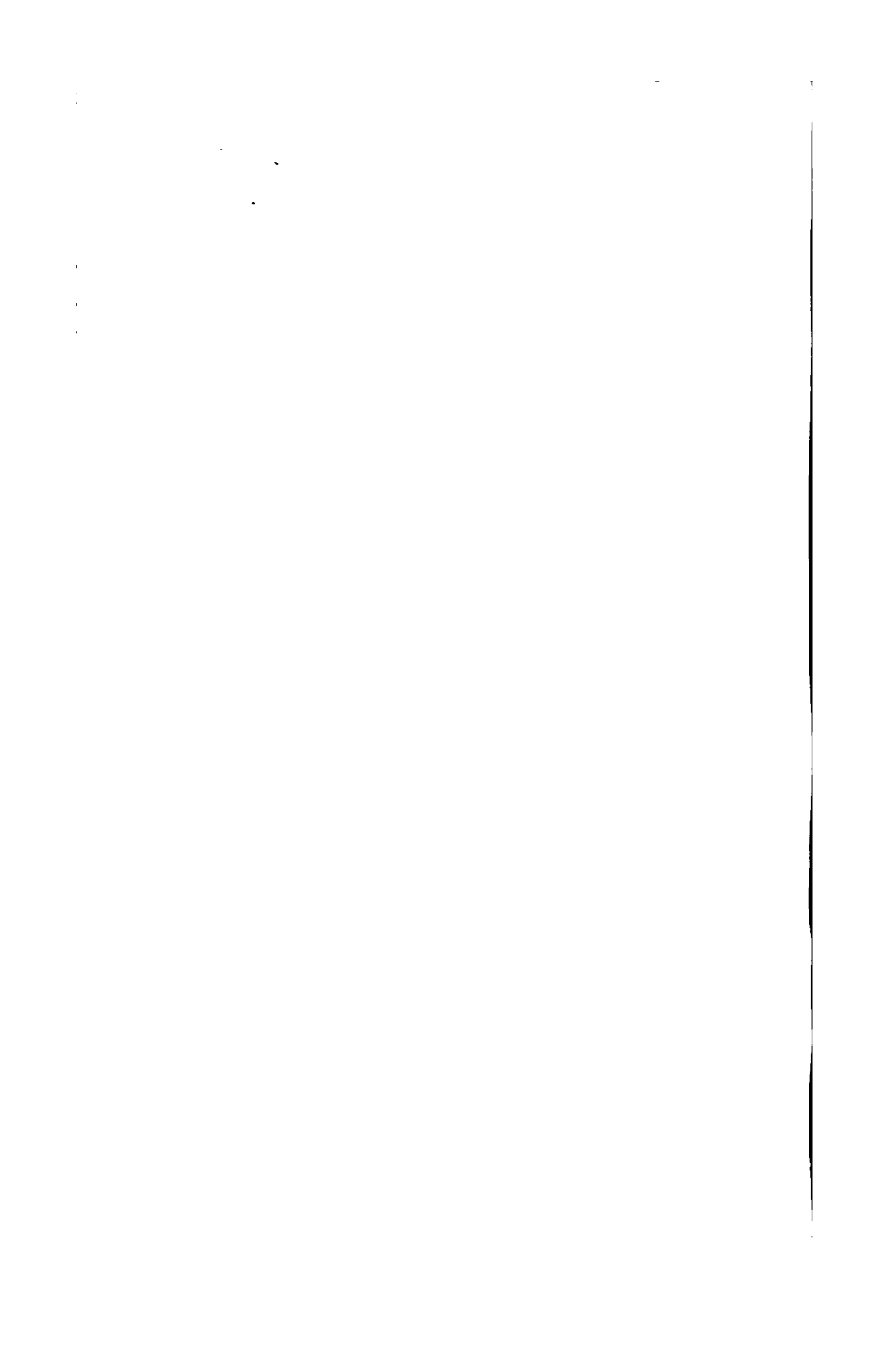
Never were the hands of queen or saint kissed with more reverence than those of my aunt by the two brothers.

Henceforth I became the adopted son of Mr. Arundel Raby, and was heir to an estate worth, *now*, fifty thousand a year. This is all I need say about myself at present.

Subsequently I became acquainted with the entire history of the persons whom I have introduced to the reader in this autobiographic fragment.

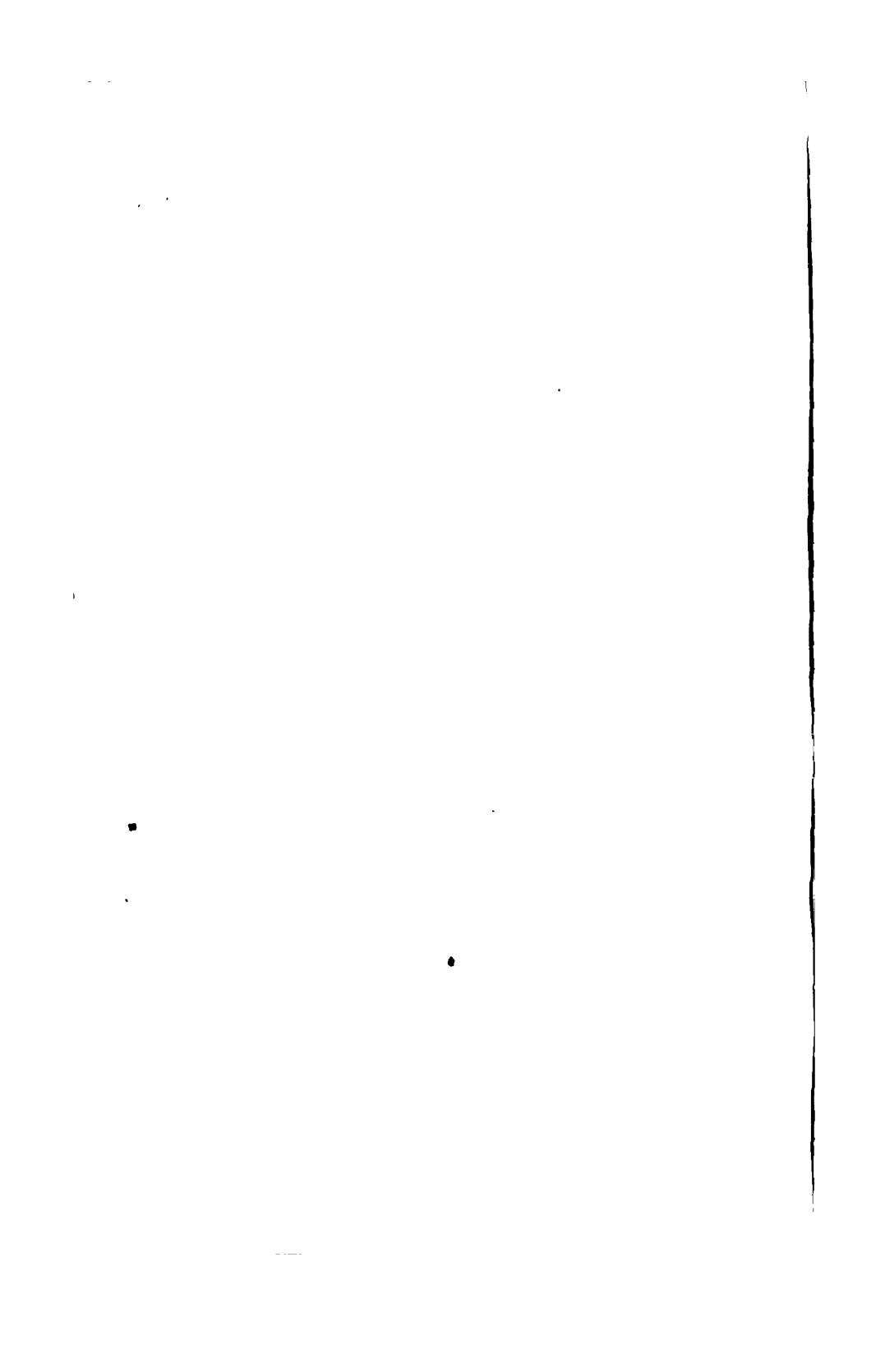
Pascal says, "*La dernière chose qu'on trouve en écrivant un ouvrage est ce qu'on doit mettre la première.*" I have felt the truth of this saying on the present occasion; and after much consideration, I determined to put first in my book what comes last in order of time—viz., my own connexion with the Raby

family. By so doing I have introduced to my readers the chief characters of my story as they were introduced to me, after the great struggles and sorrows of their lives were well-nigh over. Those who are interested in what they have seen of Margaret Hastings and Arundel Raby, and are curious concerning their previous lives, will find an account of them in the following pages.



PART II.

MARRIAGE AND BIRTH.



CHAPTER I.

MY GRANDFATHER'S FAMILY AND THE EARL OF CARLETON'S.

"Thou hast lived, my ancestor, well and happily; neither poor nor rich; learned enough; eloquent enough; ever with a sound mind in a sound body."


MARCUS ANTONIUS FLAMINIUS. *Trans.* SOUTHEY.

"It behoves the high
For their own sakes to do things worthily."

BEN JONSON.

My grandfather, the Reverend Henry Hastings, Rector of Carleton, had been a school and college friend of the late Earl of Carleton (the father of the present earl and Mr. Arundel Raby), and they continued their friendship through life. In early youth, Henry Hastings was far more happily situated than his noble companion, for he was brought up in that "little heaven below," a numerous, intelligent, and affectionate domestic circle.—With the young Viscount Merle it was very dif-

ferent. He was an only child, and the heir of large estates ; but his home in childhood was wretched, and in boyhood he had no home at all. His father, Francis, fifth Earl of Carleton, was what all the world called a very strange man—an oddity. Some few who knew a little of his private life, said that he was the victim of an uncontrolled temper, a domestic tyrant, a misanthrope, a miser ; those who knew him best, servants and persons who had been about him from childhood, said that he was not quite sane ; and a few of the plain-speaking kind had been heard to say, that the Earl of Carleton was madder than many a man in Bedlam. He had had a gentle wife whom he killed with terror ; and he had often frightened his child into fits ; but he went about the world as if it were perfectly safe for the world that he should do so. Once, indeed, the countess's family endeavoured to protect her and her child, by procuring a commission of lunacy against him ; but he showed then, that he was "only mad north-north-west." He controlled himself so well, that he was pronounced to be of sound mind ; and his wife's relations were suspected by the world of conspiracy against him. From that time he



showed a violent antipathy to his wife, whom he contrived to keep always under his own roof, by refusing to let her have her child if she went away. By a perversion of nature, common enough among insane people, his son became an object of suspicion and dislike to him. It was reported that he once attempted the boy's life in a fit of passion. It would be a useless and a revolting task to give any further particulars of the earl's domestic conduct. It remains an open question to this day, whether he was really insane or only very wicked.

On the death of his mother, the young viscount was sent to Eton. His father was glad to have him out of sight. He then shut up Carleton Castle and went abroad, where he was occasionally heard of by English travellers, as the hero of stories that made their hair stand on end.

The "wicked lord," as he was called, was miserly. This showed itself in various ways, but especially in his treatment of his son while at school and at the university. If it had not been for Lady Morton, his father's sister, the boy would often have been without decent clothing, pocket-money, or the com-

mon necessities of a gentleman's son. Lady Morton took a great deal of notice of her nephew, and he generally spent the vacations at her house. I believe I am not assigning to Lady Morton any more of the world's wisdom than is her due, when I say she was actuated to this line of conduct as much by policy as by real affection for her brother's child. Frederick, Viscount Merle, was heir to an earldom and 40,000*l.* a year. Though his father was a "horrid brute," "an undoubted madman," and the boy depended on her and Sir Joseph for many things besides golden "tips," yet the time would certainly come when he would be one of the best matches in England. Lady Morton had five daughters;—and having the gift of prevision on their account, was very glad to make family affection do double duty. She thought a little indulgence and a few guineas well expended on so promising a nephew. And what thought the young viscount? He thought his aunt and uncle were very kind, and he liked his pretty cousins; but he was a clear-sighted as well as an affectionate boy; and their gay, worldly household, did not please him half so well as the home of his friend,

Harry Hastings. There, he felt that he was loved for his own sake as well as for Harry's ; and there he met with true and delicate sympathy for his misfortunes. For his mother's death and his father's conduct he felt to be heavy misfortunes ; and he was early "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

When he was about eighteen he fell in love ; not with one of his beautiful cousins, but with one of Harry Hastings' sisters. Strange to say, her parents decidedly disapproved of the connexion. They spoke to their daughter gravely on the subject, representing their reasons for this disapprobation. Against the young man himself they had nothing to say ; they believed him to be noble, amiable, truthful, every way worthy to be Henry's friend ; but against his marriage with one of their daughters they had two reasons to urge. First, they knew a great deal of the viscount's father, and firmly believed him to be insane. His disease, they expected, would show itself sooner or later in his son ; or, passing over him, would reappear in his children.—Secondly, they believed that a marriage in her own rank of life would be a happier one for their daughter.

The young lady did as her parents wished, and refused the viscount's hand, without assigning any reason. After that, she never gave him any encouragement, and he believed that she was, and always had been, indifferent to him. His friend Henry held a different opinion. He believed that his sister was attached to the handsome young viscount; but being once convinced that it would be wrong to marry any one with a taint of insanity in his veins, she had set herself steadily to work to control her love, and, if possible, to destroy it. This was just what might be expected from a Hastings. The family was remarkable for strength and steadiness of principle. I never heard that we were, any of us, distinguished for genius, or learning, or personal beauty; but, as far back as our family records go, we have borne a character for high and inflexible integrity and persistency in a conscientious course of conduct. My grandfather's sister was a remarkable instance of this; for the viscount's passion seemed to strengthen with opposition, and she had to resist what almost every woman finds irresistible—a devoted and steady affection; and this, too, from a graceful, intel-

lectual man; young, handsome, high-born, and able to place her in a lofty position in society, for which, I have often heard my aunt Margaret say, she was very well fitted, being of a commanding appearance, clever, and ambitious. But, my great-aunt having sacrificed thus far to principle, indemnified herself for it by steadily refusing to listen to any other overtures of marriage. These, by that law of contraries which so often seems to sway human affairs, came to her more frequently than to any of her sisters; but she died an old maid.

Her lover became Earl of Carleton in his four-and-twentieth year, and came into the possession of an immense fortune, in part the result of his father's hoarding. At this period, I believe, he made another proposal of marriage to my great-aunt, which she again refused; after imparting, at his earnest entreaty, her reason for doing so.

For several years after that, the young earl lived in retirement at Carleton. His only associate there was my grandfather, to whom he had presented the living of Carleton, which was worth about seven hundred a year. The two young men lived together in habits of intimacy. They walked, rode, read, and worked

together. My grandfather had a very high idea of the duties of a clergyman ; and the earl, too, had a notion, that large estates brought to their possessor many duties besides that of owning them.

My grandfather married after he had been settled at Carleton two years. The earl, to the astonishment of neighbours, tenants, and his fashionable kinsfolk, remained single till he was thirty years old ; when, after spending a season in London, he married his cousin, Miss Caroline Morton, and thus fulfilled his aunt's constant prediction, that " he would marry one of the girls after all." The lady displayed her new rank of countess with great splendour and gaiety, before the eyes of the whole world of fashion in Rome, Paris, and London, and was then brought down to Carleton by her husband. She was by no means insensible to the grandeur of the castle ; but she was also keenly alive to its dulness, before very long. There was positively nothing to amuse her—" nothing to pass away the time—no opera, no balls, not a creature to speak to—*pas un chat de connoissance*," as she wrote to her sister. I have obtained possession of a packet of the old (then the young) countess's letters, and as

I can just decipher the pale brown writing, I will select one or two extracts to lay before the reader, because they will put him in possession of a few facts connected with my grandfather's family at that time, and the state of affairs at Carleton. My Lady Carleton writes like "a woman of quality," barring the spelling, which is correct;—and not like a *femme savante*. She does not want for cleverness, however; her other qualities the reader may be left to discover for himself. About a month after her domestication at Carleton, she writes thus :

" Carleton, July, 179—.

" DEAR BESSY,

" So you are at Bath with all the rest of the world. Happy you ! What a treasure of a husband ! to carry you about just where you want to go. If my Lord Carleton—but he is a good sort of man in his way, I assure you, and is very kind to me ; only, I wish he was not so monstrous grave, and would not talk to me so much about 'the duties of my position!' Just as if one were a prime minister, or a waiting-gentlewoman ! He has the strangest notions for a man of

his rank! He goes about among his tenants—over their farms and into their cottages—sometimes, I believe, he sits down and drinks beer with them. He walks about in the queerest dress you ever saw. I vow he looks no better than a farmer himself, sometimes. I don't mean to say he dines or sits with me in that trim. No! he is not so bad as that.

“I would not mind all this, my dear, because nobody can mistake it for anything more than condescension on his part; and he does not expect me to follow his example; but what I *do* mind, is his extreme intimacy with that clergyman and his family. I mentioned these people before. I foresaw they would be a perpetual torment to me, and so they are. I dislike to have people of that sort always about one. Not that they are disagreeable or ill-bred. I have no fault to find with them, but that my lord thinks them faultless, and holds them up (especially Mrs. Hastings) as a pattern to me. Now, I always made a point of hating any one set up as a pattern to me, and accordingly I hated that woman the moment I saw her. As for Mr. Hastings, he is a very good man; admirably fitted for his profession. In short, I

dislike the very name of Hastings (it's too good for a plebeian family), and if it were not for Frederick, who really is much attached to the man, I would not take any notice of his family beyond the formal visits which I am obliged to pay to all the small gentry and clergy in the neighbourhood. As it is, we go to the Rectory, or the Rectory comes to us, every day. We eat and drink, and walk and drive with the Rectory; we talk of nothing but the Rectory—if the Rectory family had been a woman, Frederick would have married it. Ah! now I must leave off, for there is the tall rector himself (he's a good-looking man, by the way), come to show me some plan for a school in the village, which, I believe, I am to have the credit of building, though I am shameless enough to confess to you that I care nothing for the thing, not even for having the credit of it.

* * * * *

“When I left off yesterday to see Mr. Hastings' plan of the school-house, I dreaded his visit very much, for it was the first time I had been alone with him, and I knew Frederick was gone out on one of his benevolent missions for half the day. I do not think I was

very gracious at first, but Mr. Hastings seemed to take no notice of that, but began talking on various subjects, as if he were determined to draw me out. I was not inclined to be drawn out; but he persevered; and, obstinate as I am, I was obliged to smile and be amused at his conversation, which was really very clever. To my surprise, I found that he had mixed a great deal with the world, and knew everybody *celebrated* or distinguished in England and France. He told me some amusing anecdotes of Lady —, Mr. —, Mdme. de —, and W. S., which are better than anything of the kind I ever heard before. Then we talked of drawings and pictures, and he quite excited me to try and make sketches again. He says Frederick sketches capitally, and will be delighted to find me a willing pupil. Then came the plan for the school. I did not quite like the design, and pointed out something which could easily be improved. *That* seemed to please Mr. Hastings, and we went over the drawing together, criticising it—he, very well;—I, pertly and incoherently, after my fashion; and the end of *that* was that I undertook to make a copy of the design with my own addi-

tions and improvements. We both agreed as to the importance of having better music in the church ; and to obtain this, he suggested that we should have a number of the village people taught singing in the school. This brought us to talk of music. On that, too, I found my gentleman well informed. He knew more about Paesiello, Bach, Handel, Purcell, and sacred composers generally, than I did, and I knew more about Glück, Cimarosa, Mozart, and the charming, charming opera composers ; and as each wanted to know more of what the other knew most, we got on very well. I found he could sing ;—indeed, he has a very good voice, and it is much more cultivated than mine. He asked me to sing a duet from Glück's 'Orpheus' with him ; and I did so. As he sings so well I enjoyed it very much. He seemed pleased with my voice, and begged for something else. We were trying with great animation the duet between Adam and Eve in Haydn's new oratorio, 'the Creation' (which Mr. Hastings does not quite like), when Frederick came in. I could not help laughing when I caught his eye, for I had declared at breakfast, that very morning, that I was afraid ' I never could get

on with his very sedate friend the clergyman;' and at the same time I thought in my heart all the things against the whole tribe of Hastings which adorns the former portion of this elegant and interesting letter. Well, well! we women are privileged to change our minds! What used papa to say whenever mamma gave way to second thoughts? Something about '*varium et mutabile semper*.' I am sure the sentence did not apply to *him*, good man, for he *invariably* said the same thing whenever she changed her plans or opinions. For my part, I hate to say, or do, or see, or hear the same thing over and over again. I like variety. So the *varium et mutabile* for ever! Perhaps, by way of another change, I may take to liking some more of the Hastings' family. Good-bye for the present! I am going out to sketch with Frederick.

* * * * *

"*Thursday*.—Positively these Hastings people have a witchcraft in them! Yesterday, after a long morning's sketching, Frederick and I were driving home, like Darby and Joan, in my pony phaeton, when we met Harry and James Hastings, two fine little fellows of eight and six years of age. 'Lord

Carleton ! Lord Carleton !' shouted the eldest, 'papa wants to speak to you. He has been up to the castle, and now he has sent us to meet you and ask you to come to him on your way home.'—'Very well, Harry. Here ! jump up on this side ; and you, James, get up on that. You won't mind the child sitting at your feet, my dear, will you ?' Of course I could not *say* I did mind it ; and so we rode with the two children perched at the bottom of the carriage, all through the village to the gate of the Rectory. I was rather amused at this whim of Frederick's, and perhaps I smiled at the children more than I had done before. This emboldened little James, who is a sweet, fair-haired, open-browed child, and leaning his chin on my knee, he looked with a sort of shy curiosity up into my face. I returned his look, and patting his cheek, said, 'Well ! what do you think of me ?'—'I think you are a very pretty lady,' he replied, softly. This made me laugh outright. The child put his hand confidently into mine ; when Frederick said, 'But, James, do you love people because they are pretty ?' Looking at me once more, he lisped out charmingly, 'Yeth, I love everybody that ith pretty.' I

kissed the child. He looked so innocent and unconscious that he was saying something so very natural that he ought not to say it.

"I was persuaded to stay with Frederick and dine that day with Mr. and Mrs. Hastings.

"In general I am no admirer of your ornamental cottages; I like a large, handsome, substantial house; but this Rectory is a charming old place. It seemed very small to me, but Mrs. Hastings says that it is by no means a small house of its kind; that it contains twelve good rooms besides kitchen and offices, which is very well, I suppose, for a country clergyman's house. Nothing can be in better taste than the rooms I have seen. There is enough of the useful, enough of the luxurious, and enough of the purely ornamental, and not a bit too much of anything. I had noticed the elegance and comfort which pervaded the drawing-room when I called at the Rectory before; but its beauty struck me more than ever, after dinner, when Mrs. Hastings and I left the gentlemen. The glass-doors leading into the garden were thrown open, the setting sun illumined every object in the room—chintz-covered easy-chairs, the very epitome of comfort and clean-

liness, stood invitingly in the most desirable places—the pianoforte was open and strewn with music; books and needlework were on the tables; statuettes and flowers in vases adorned various parts of the room. A delicious perfume of roses and lilies was wafted in from the garden; the sound of children's voices and their careless laughter came thence, also, and the two boys and their little sister Sophia were seen sporting with a greyhound on the lawn.

“‘This is a sweet place, Mrs. Hastings!’ I exclaimed, in a tone of genuine admiration.

“‘You think so?’ she said, turning to look at me.

“‘I do, indeed. You must not suppose that I am incapable of appreciating beauty and taste out of a large castle or a fine house in London.’ And I took a seat beside her, and was determined to be at ease with her. ‘I like your house, and your children, and your husband,’ I continued, ‘and, if you have no objection, I am going to like you. You must give me a little time first—because my husband has contracted the unfortunate habit of pointing you out as a model to me.’

“‘Say no more,’ she interrupted with a

heartly laugh—‘I see we shall be friends. I am very glad of this; because I had almost given you up as a hopeless, unmitigated fine lady. This made me very sorry, because we are so accustomed to consider Lord Carleton as one of ourselves, that we could ill bear the idea of not loving his wife. We look to Lady Carleton for help in our public duties, and for kindness and sympathy in our home circle. The lady of the castle is the most important personage for ten miles round next to the lord.’

“In a few minutes I found myself confiding all my little troubles to Mrs. Hastings. To be candid, though, I must confess that she appealed to my weak point by saying, ‘We are equals in birth, Lady Carleton. You are a baronet’s daughter—and so am I.’ From that moment I respected her as my equal in rank, and I soon saw that she was my superior in everything else. A more elegant-looking woman, in spite of the simplicity of her dress, I have never seen.

* * * * *

“I asked Frederick to-day something about Mrs. Hastings. (She has been spending the morning with me, and helping me to order

the baby-linen I shall want.) Who do you think she was? That daughter of Sir James Darlington whose marriage he never forgave. I remember hearing about it when I was in the school-room. Don't you recollect the long talk you and I had with Miss Price about it? When we asked her if it was right to marry for love without the consent of parents, and the poor thing coloured so that we both felt sure that she had been in love herself at some remote period of her life. I wonder what has become of her, by the way. She must be old now. She might be glad of a home. I am sure there are plenty of rooms in this great rambling place if she would like to come and live here. I should like to have her kind ugly face about me again; it would look like old times. Besides, I think she might be very useful in helping me to manage the servants; and Frederick is very anxious I should have some person with me above the condition of a nurse. I shall speak to Mrs. Hastings about it.

"Tell mamma not to be uneasy about me next month. I really can do very well without her—much better than I did before, in Rome."

CHAPTER II.

MORE OF MY LADY CARLETON'S LETTERS.

"A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food."

WORDSWORTH.

"It is a long time since I wrote to you, dear Bessy. In the interval how much has happened to me! I have become the happiest mother in the world! My two boys are models of health and beauty, Mrs. Hastings says. Frederick is happier than I ever expected to see him. Though they are twins, they are not very much alike, except in size; which nurse says is not common, one child being generally larger and every way handsomer than the other.

"Allow me to introduce your nephews. Francis, Viscount Merle (it seems so funny

to give a little helpless creature so grand a name !) is just a quarter of an hour older than his brother, Master Arundel Raby. He is a quieter and better-tempered child, too ; but Arundel has such extraordinary dark blue eyes, and such a quantity of silky hair on his little head, that he is, at present, a wonderfully beautiful baby. I hope he won't grow up ugly. I have heard that pretty babies sometimes grow up ugly. However, Mrs. Hastings says that they much oftener grow up pretty. —I must leave off, now, for the children want me.—Oh ! let me say 'thank you,' for hunting up dear old Miss Price. She is quite a treasure to us. Frederick says we must have been the stupidest girls in the world not to have seen that she was a very superior woman. He declares that *he* found it out the very first holidays he spent with us. You know she was always very kind to him."

More than a year after this date I find the following :

"DEAR BESSY,

"I have been making myself useful. I dare say you doubt my ability to do anything of the kind ; but it is true. I happened to

be spending an evening with Mrs. Hastings about a month ago, when she was taken ill. We had been expecting her confinement for several days, therefore everything was ready. The nurse was in the house; and I sent off directly for the doctor and Mr. Hastings, who happened to be in the village. Before either of them arrived, Mrs. Hastings was safely delivered of a fine girl. I washed and dressed it, and was so unwilling to leave it and its dear mother, that I got Frederick to let me stay for a week at the Rectory. My own boys were brought to see me every day by Miss Price. It was the funniest thing in the world to see the two sturdy little fellows looking at the baby. Frank was quite jealous, and did not like me to kiss it. Arundel, on the contrary, kept close to it, watching it open and shut its eyes, with the intensest curiosity; and whenever the little creature put out its soft pink fists and struggled about—as if it were not satisfied with existence—Arundel would put his little brown hand over the little pink one, and smile in the little pink face, and utter his sweet cooing, '*Poor, poor!*' as is his habit, when he loves or pities anything very much. I suppose my little Arundel

will grow into a *bon père de famille*, and Frank into a baby-hater.

* * * * *

“Did I tell you that I had settled in my own mind that I would be godmother to Mrs. Hastings’ little girl?—I had; and I sent to London for a magnificent gold mug, and gold-mounted coral, and some beautiful lace robes, such as I should have for a girl of my own, and I had my own name wrought upon everything, as I intended the little thing to be called after me. I remember I ended your letter somewhat abruptly, that I might go and superintend the unpacking of a box from town containing these things. As I went to my room, I peeped into dear Miss Price’s, and insisted on dragging her with me to see ‘something I wanted her opinion about.’ I had kept the thing secret even from her and Frederick. She was very much pleased with the beauty of the presents; but she said they were scarcely suitable for a clergyman’s daughter; that if I had spent a fourth of the money in finery, and put the rest of it out at interest for the child, to accumulate till she was twenty-one, it would have been more judicious. I laughed at what I called her

‘poverty-stricken notions,’ and asked her whether she expected that little Miss Hastings was one day to become a *governess*?—She replied that it was probable—that it was, indeed, more than probable that she might. There was every likelihood that she would be one of a numerous family, and that Mr. Hastings’ living would not enable him to provide a competence for them all, after his death. I had never thought of this ; and as I looked at the magnificent robes and the golden coral that were fit for a princess, I saw that I had been as Price said, *injudicious*. This vexed me ; for it was but the day before I had boasted to Frederick that my judgment was fast maturing ; that I should never do absurd things, upon impulse, any more. I suppose I looked cross ; for Price said, soothingly,

“ ‘Never mind, my dear. It is done now ; and as you have had your name put on all these things, I suppose it can’t be undone. You have told Mr. and Mrs. Hastings of your wish to be sponsor ?’

“ ‘No,’ I said ; ‘I wished to surprise them by sending these things down with a little note I have written on the subject.’

“ ‘Are you quite sure, my dear, that Mr.

and Mrs. Hastings have no engagement with some relation of their own to be the other godmother? They have this day asked me to be one.'

" ' *You?* Why not *me?* ' I asked, hurriedly.

" ' I do not know why they wish *me* to be godmother to their child; but I think I know one reason why they would not ask *you*. ' And she pointed to the handsome christening presents before us. ' Mr. and Mrs. Hastings are not mercenary people. By asking the Countess of Carleton to be godmother to their little girl they feel that they would be asking a handsome present for her. They know your lavish generosity. It would make them uncomfortable either to be made the objects of it in this way, or to have to reject it. Can you not put yourself in their place, my dear child? You will then see how natural, how necessary, how commendable is this sort of pride in their case. '

" I saw the truth of what she said, and was very much annoyed at it. Presently I asked her whether she saw any impropriety in my going down to ask Mrs. Hastings to allow me to be the child's godmother; for my heart was set upon the thing, and I can't

bear to be baffled. Miss Price said, 'No;' and offered to go with me. I drove down to the Rectory. At the gate we saw Frederick's groom holding his horse; and as we entered the house Frederick himself was coming out. He looked so pale that I stopped him to inquire if anything was the matter. He replied hurriedly, and as if he were thinking of something else, 'No! oh, no! I may have to go to town for a week or ten days, that is all.' Then as he passed on to the gate he turned his head over his shoulder to me and said, 'Don't wait dinner for me to-day.' There was something in his manner which seemed to say, 'Ask me no questions. My mind is troubled, but you cannot relieve it.' I remembered how Henry looked when he lost that money at Newmarket; and vague thoughts of betting, racing, and gambling losses flashed through my mind. I sprang after him, and laid my hand on his arm.

" 'Frederick! have you lost much?' I whispered.

" 'Lost!' he exclaimed, in a wild, hoarse voice, and with such a look in the eyes, that I verily believe he was mad at the moment! In such a state I feared he might go and do

something desperate ; as men often do after losing money to a great amount. So, I spoke softly—

“ ‘ Yes, *lost*. Never mind, dear, how much you have lost. I can make it up to you. There is North Ashurst—the great estate in Yorkshire which uncle Bernard has left me, you know.’ ”

“ I could not understand the changes that came over his face as he looked at me. However, the expression gradually softened, and he smiled affectionately, and patted the hand that lay on his arm ; his face all the time was flushed, and there was a tear in his eye as he stooped down and said :

“ ‘ God bless you, my little wife ! don’t be afraid ! I have not been gambling. Any loss I experience in life you will make up, dear ; not out of your estate, but out of your love. There is nothing the matter.’ ”

“ ‘ Then you will be back to dinner ?’ ”

“ ‘ Yes. I will be back.’ And he rode off.

“ When he was out of sight I went into the house with Miss Price. We found Mr. and Mrs. Hastings together in the drawing-room. They both looked graver than usual, I thought. I asked to see the baby. It was

brought down, and very sweet and lovely it looked.

“ ‘Have you decided on a name?’ I inquired, as I was nursing it; being anxious to arrive at the object of my visit.

“ ‘Oh, yes! *that* was decided before she was born,’ said Mrs. Hastings. ‘It has always been our wish that our second girl should be named *Margaret*, after Henry’s sister.’

“ ‘Margaret!’ I repeated. ‘Oh! I don’t like that name!’

“ ‘Don’t you?’ said Mr. Hastings. ‘We all think it beautiful. What name would you like us to give your little pet?’

“ ‘To tell the truth, I was in hopes you would let me be one of the sponsors, and that you would call her *Caroline*, after me,’ I said at once; for you know how impatient I am; that I never can bear to delay anything. I was glad to see that both Mr. and Mrs. Hastings looked pleased at this. The latter said:

“ ‘My dear Lady Carleton, you are very kind to think of this, and we should have liked it very much, but that we have already engaged two sponsors in whom we have

great confidence—women who have had more experience in the moral training of young people than you have had yet,’ she added, with a smile; ‘and we are not of those who understand the act of appointing sponsors in baptism as a mere form. It might not be convenient or possible for a person in your position to perform the important duties of godmother to an orphan child in the station in which this little one would be at our death. On this account, then, and also because the other two ladies have each kindly consented to undertake the office, I think you must not “promise and vow” anything in the name of this child, except in the depths of your own kind heart. There, if you will register a promise to befriend her, if it is ever in your power to do so, you will make me and her father the happier; for we are not insensible to the advantages which your powerful support may be to her some day when we are gone.’

“Miss Price then spoke in her quiet little voice. ‘My dear madam, if you will allow me to resign my office in favour of Lady Carleton, I think it would be well. I am an old woman, and may not live to see the dear child

grow up. Besides, I think you ought to know that Lady Carleton has for a long time meditated proposing this to you; and has thought very seriously of *some* of her duties as godmother.' You know what a grave way she has of saying little satirical things. I was about to interpose a word, but she waved me aside with her thin hand, and I know she always means to have her own way when she does that; so I subsided into silence, as I used to do in the old school-room.

"She had her own way this time, and settled, to the satisfaction of all parties, that I was to be godmother in her place; and that the little darling is to be called Margaret Caroline.

"Frederick came home to dinner looking quite himself again. I talked away in very good spirits about our visit to the Rectory, and my little god-daughter, for I could not ask him any questions about the business which troubled him, as Miss Price dined with us. He seemed to listen attentively to what was said, but he asked no questions. At length I said,

" 'Do you know why I hate the name of Margaret?'

“ ‘No,’ he replied.

“ ‘Because I have found out that you like it better than any other woman’s name, and it is not mine. But never mind that now. Do you know this sister of Mr. Hastings?’

“ ‘I know all Hastings’ sisters ; but I have seen less of this one than of the rest of late years.’

“ ‘Is she handsome?’

“ ‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘Are the children coming down to-day?’

“ I saw he wished to turn the conversation, but I had my reasons for not turning it just yet. ‘Yes, they are coming. Frederick, if I am godmother to this child, I should like you to be godfather.’

“ ‘Don’t think of such a thing,’ he said, hurriedly and decidedly.

“ ‘Why not?’ I inquired.

“ ‘In the first place, I cannot be godfather to this girl. I hardly know the catechism myself. In the next place, I am obliged to be off to London to-morrow morning, and shall have to stay there a fortnight at least.’

“ ‘Then you will see nothing of Miss Hastings, my lord,’ said Miss Price, ‘for she is coming to-morrow evening, and returns home in a fortnight.’

“ Now, Bessy, I am not generally suspicious, but I confess that I ceased to have fears about my husband's pecuniary losses from that moment, and began to entertain some of a very different nature. How they came into my head it is vain for me to try to discover; there they are, and I cannot get rid of them; at least, not until I have seen this Margaret Hastings. I do not remember that he ever spoke to us of her. Harry Hastings, and Tom, and Catharine we used to hear of frequently when he was a boy; but Margaret we never heard of. However, it would be excessively foolish in me to make myself uncomfortable about it, even if I should find that he once had a fancy for her. It is *not* true that ‘*l'on revient toujours à ses premières amours*,’ especially when one has a pretty and a tolerably obedient wife and two such children as my lovely boys. Still, good sense will not always set the heart at rest. Frederick's tone when he said the word ‘*Lost!*’ was better suited to the loss of a first love than to the loss of a few thousand pounds. But I will not worry myself. Good-by.”

CHAPTER III.

THE PORTRAITS OF THE COUNTESS CAROLINE.

"Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes and as unfixed as those."

Rape of the Lock.

"She was a woman in her freshest age,
Of wondrous beauty and of bounty rare;
With goodly grace and comely personage
That was on earth not easy to compare."

Fairy Queen.

"Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits."


In Memoriam.

THE reader has, I dare say, come to the same conclusion with regard to the Countess of Carleton that I arrived at when I had read thus far in the old, worn letters—viz., that she was of a higher nature than she seemed, or than she believed herself to be. It was clear that her fashionable education and worldly-minded associates had not been able to spoil

her good disposition. I must not forget that I had better means of forming this opinion than the reader, because I read the whole of these letters many times, and found indications of character in those portions which are not set down here, because they have nothing to do with my present story.

There was a full-length portrait of this lady, styled in the catalogue of pictures at Carleton Castle, "*Caroline, wife of Frederick, sixth Earl of Carleton,*" by Gainsborough, that hung over the mantelpiece in my aunt's bedroom. In this she looked very pretty, and decidedly coquettish. She was painted in a court-dress.—Ostrich feathers, a train, diamonds, and the usual paraphernalia seemed to sit on her with a careless and half-mocking, rather than with a stately air. This was painted just after her marriage; and I believe the artist has contrived to give the character of the woman.

There were two other portraits of the "*Countess Caroline,*" as she was generally called. They were not so valuable, as works of art, as the one just spoken of; but I have been assured, by many persons who knew her, that they were good likenesses. If it be so, no



one could say of the countess that she had "no character at all." It would sound much more like the truth to say that she had three distinct characters, so unlike were these three pictures, and yet each was so full of individuality. The second picture represents her with her two infant sons. An exquisitely touching look of motherly love animates her pretty face. No coquetry, no levity is there. It is clear that her young heart is no longer the plaything of fancy or of vanity; but is filled, every corner of it, with a deep, satisfying feeling. What a sweet, tender gravity there is in her eyes as she admonishes the little Arundel, with upraised finger! How unlike in expression to those bright, uncertain, laughing orbs in the Gainsborough picture! This family group, though not the work of an artist known to fame, is well painted, and being a great favourite with her son, the present earl, who has always cherished the memory of his mother with affection, hangs in the state drawing-room.

The third picture hung in Mr. Arundel's chamber in my childhood. In this, the features looked worn and almost colourless, with the exception of the lips, which retained a

tinge of their old generous red, and the dark mark under the eyes, which gave them almost a luminous appearance as they glanced out from beneath the well-bent brow. In this picture the eyes of the countess are like those of her son Arundel, and there is a general resemblance to him in the face. She wears a black dress, and a white lace cap shades her thin face and confines the hair, once black, now fast turning to grey. She sits upright, but it seems as if it were an effort to do so. The small delicate hands are folded in her lap; the mouth is firmly closed, and the corners have a painful expression; the eyes look out straight before her; they are still and calm, with an uncommon mixture of keen intelligence and gentle resignation. They look as if she had known a bitter sorrow, and finding that it could not be remedied had submitted to it. There is no effort of a false philosophy in her aspect—no determination to seem or to be cheerful—no wilful blindness to the truth. She was evidently very unhappy, but it is quite as evident that she could bear to be unhappy without any affectation of trying to believe that it was a good thing, if she would but think so. She was

born before the modern system of Epicurean-Stoicism came into vogue; and not affecting to have the enlarged vision of a superhuman being, did not believe in her heart that what she felt to be a strong, enduring evil, was but happiness in disguise. She had no notion that she would be fulfilling God's will by trying to explain and argue it away into a sort of sublimated spiritual pleasure. If she thought anything about the matter, it was just this:—that when God sent an affliction upon her, he meant that she should be afflicted. She had a healthy moral nature, but a very poor talent for metaphysical speculation. Though in the countess's latest portrait there was much sorrow, there was no remorse—no self-upbraiding. You felt that she had not been the cause of her own grief—that whatever it was it came from without, and not from within. There was nothing of self in the sadness—no self-absorption—no self-tormenting. This gave her countenance its dignified calmness and resignation.

I will now give some particulars of the Lady Carleton's life subsequently to the events already described. The reader will then be able to judge how far the great

change in her appearance may be accounted for. I have ample materials in the form of old journals kept by my grandfather and others, and letters from members of his family, as well as from the earl himself to various persons ; besides the very exact oral testimony of my aunt Margaret as to what she herself saw and heard ; but it is still from that bundle of the countess's letters to her sister Bessy, who seems to have been her habitual confidante, that I must continue to make extracts for some time. This seems to me the most satisfactory way of telling what there is to be told—the countess being given to a love of detail in her letters, almost Richardsonian. We return, therefore, to the time of my aunt Margaret's christening.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RECTOR'S SISTER AND THE CHRISTENING.

"Inured to any hue
The world can cast; that cannot cast that mind
Out of her form of goodness, that doth see
Both what the best and worst of earth can be."

DANIEL.

"I HAVE nothing to entertain you, my dear Bessy, but a gossip about the christening of my little god-daughter; and as you have seen many christenings, and found them all very much alike, I dare say, you shall be spared a full, true, and particular account of this one. But perhaps you are curious about my partner in the sponsorship. As she is the object most in my thoughts this morning, I will talk to you about her. I did not see her until yesterday, the morning of the christening.

It was to be a grand gala day for all the children ; and my two boys, with their nurses and Miss Price, went to join the little Hastingses before I drove over to the Rectory myself. We were all to walk thence to the church ; Mr. Hastings will not hear of baptising a healthy infant in a house.

“ I was in the drawing-room alone, waiting for Mrs. Hastings, when the door opened, and a lady I did not know entered the room. She did not see me at first, and advanced to a work-table that stood by the open window. She sat down ; and I did not move, for I wished to examine her unnoticed, feeling quite sure it was Mr. Hastings’ sister. She is very like him. She is a tall, elegant-looking young woman ; indeed, a very striking figure. Her face is not handsome ; the features are too strongly marked, and she is much too sallow. Still there is something very agreeable in the expression of her face when she speaks ; the eyes beam out with such a soft melancholy kindness. When she is at rest I do not know that I quite like the expression ; it strikes me as being unnaturally calm, as if she took strong measures with herself not to show any feeling.

However, it does not affect everybody in this way. Miss Price says, that Miss Hastings' face, when she is not speaking, reminds her of a lake she once saw in Scotland, where the water was so deep, and the shelter from the wind so complete, that there was never a ripple on its surface. I think her face is like a lake, too, but a frozen one, seen by moonlight. Her whole manner is rather subdued, than what one calls soft or gentle. She speaks in a clear, steady voice, that never falters. I do not think she has so much feeling as Miss Price gives her credit for. She is thought very much of by her brother, I can see; and to him her manner is really affectionate. I fancy Mrs. Hastings is a little afraid of her. Cold and reserved people always throw a little gloom wherever they go. They may be very estimable, but to my thinking they would be a great deal more so if they would take a little pains to make their manners agreeable. We impulsive, warm, social people are constantly being dragooned by them into the suppression of our feelings. I may not be an impartial judge, but it seems to me that there is quite as much unhappiness caused in the world by

your very correct prudent people of principle as ever *nous autres*, indiscreet folks, cause by our impulsive actions. But if I had had the making of my own faults, I would have erred on the safe side; so that other people should suffer from them instead of myself. I might lower the thermometer wherever I went, but I should only be the more respected. Ah, Bessy! joking apart, we English are solemn simpletons, when we might be merry and wise! How absurdly we try to check impulsive, sympathetic natures in our children, and erect our national vice of dreary reserve into a cardinal virtue! I mean to inculcate cheerfulness and gaiety upon my boys as the highest moral excellence.

“Don’t think that all this is *à propos* of my new acquaintance. No. She does not throw cold water over you by her presence; she is not conspicuously silent when other people are talking in a frivolous style, as many would-be wise folks are — forgetting that it is ‘*une grande folie de vouloir être sage tout seul.*’ She converses easily and cleverly. I can imagine that in a thoroughly congenial society she would be very brilliant. I say *congenial*,

for it was clear to me that though she was quite at ease and contented with our company at the christening yesterday, yet she was not in her proper element. I felt that she was superior in mental vigour and culture to Mrs. Hastings and myself. She never said a common-place thing; and no one else present said anything at all sensible or witty but she capped it with something better; and this without an effort or apparent consciousness of superiority. I never saw any one whom I think less likely to be ill-natured or satirical, and I would rather leave my character in her hands than in those of half my acquaintance. It is the judgment of little minds I fear, not that of great ones; and whenever I make a fool of myself, I hope it may be before a very wise person—like Miss Hastings. Miss Price wonders whether she will ever write a book, and says she thinks it would be worth reading. I do not think she will marry; yet she is not more than thirty, and is good-looking. I have made up my mind that no man will fall in love with her *now*. I dare say she was different ten years ago.

“It was a pretty sight, the drawing-room

at the Rectory on the morning of the christening, when we were all assembled to go to church. Mrs. Hastings looking her handsomest, and Mr. Hastings looking gentle and stately, in his surplice, stood in the middle of the room caressing a group of children—really beautiful children—their own three and my two, who were all allowed, as a great treat, to go to church and see the baby christened. The excitement of the five was a little subdued by the solemnity of the occasion and the idea of church, but they were all very animated. Arundel was by far the quietest, though ; for he seemed much occupied with Miss Hastings, and stood staring at her with his finger in his mouth. She, in her turn, bestowed much attention on him and his brother ; if I may judge by the way in which she looked from one to the other, as she sat arranging a nosegay for me. She took very little notice of them in any other way,—asked no questions about their age, or anything else connected with them. I do not think she kissed, or took them by the hand, or played with their pretty curling hair ; which, I confess, rather surprised me, as most

people are apt to fall into raptures at the first sight of these children ; for, to say the truth, though they are my own, it would not be an easy thing to find two such beautiful boys. They have such winning ways, too, that it is pleasant to most persons to take them in their arms. However, it did not seem so to Miss Hastings. I thought it odd, and began to fancy I should positively dislike her. I hate a woman whose heart does not soften towards children. There she sat, quietly arranging those senseless flowers, while that lovely animated blossom, my Arundel, stood looking at her, the very picture of pretty infantine curiosity and bashfulness. She went on conversing with me about some book we had chanced to mention, and seemed scarcely to be aware that the child was watching her, except that now and then I saw her glance furtively at him, and then look back to her flowers. As no notice was taken of him, the child began to approach us ; when he had crept within half a yard of her chair, Miss Hastings rose, and retreating towards the open window, said rather quickly— ‘ I must gather another sprig of jessamine ! ’ and passed into the garden. In

a moment I lost sight of her. So it seems did the child, for he ran to the window, in his pretty fashion, to look after her. I was curious to see what he would do. He soon got outside, as if in pursuit of the object of his curiosity, and disappeared from my sight. Fearing lest he might fall, I stepped through the window to look after him. I could not see him for a moment, on account of a large shrub. I was about to go round it, when I caught sight of something white on the other side of the shrub. It was Miss Hastings' dress. I stopped, and looking again through the branches, saw her apparently kneeling ; and with my pretty Arundel clasped in her arms. She did not spare caresses *then* ; she kissed him many times, and put back his curls that she might examine his face the better. Presently she looked quickly over her shoulder, as if she feared that she might be seen from the window, and then stood upright. I drew back within the room, for I had an indefinite feeling that she would be vexed if she knew that I had seen her caress the child. In a few minutes she returned, looking as composed as before, with some more

flowers, leading Arundel by the hand, and carefully guiding his steps. He did not leave her when she sat down again, but stood by, looking first at her face and then at her flowers, in open-eyed amazement. I never saw the child so occupied by a stranger before. Nothing diverted his attention till the baby made its appearance. All the other little ones immediately surrounded the nurse with entreaties to be allowed to look at it, and he joined them. Miss Hastings and I watched this group while Mrs. Hastings was receiving Mr. and Mrs. Grey, of Langford Grange. The gentleman was to be Frederick's proxy as godfather. In a short time Mr. Hastings announced that it was time to go to the church, and now,—I will spare you all description of the ceremony.

“The rest of the day was spent very pleasantly. In the morning Mrs. Hastings and I were engaged with the children on the lawn; playing with them, superintending their dinner, which the servants had set out under a wide-spreading oak, and talking about them—their little ailments, their pretty ways, their uncommon intelligence and good looks, and

the hundred other themes connected with her darlings in the mind of every mother. I was remarkably happy that morning, and felt very proud of my twins. Miss Price sat in a chair near at hand busily tatting and watching us. Occasionally I caught Miss Hastings' eye, as she paced to and fro with her brother on the lawn, near enough to our merry group to see all that was going on. What they talked of I could not hear; but several times I fancied they spoke of me and the children. At that time I had not had an opportunity of knowing the sort of person that Miss Hastings is, or I should have been much more curious about what they were saying.

"This opportunity arrived after the children's dinner, when all except Harry and James were taken away for their usual *siesta*. For my part, I felt dull enough without the children. This will strike you as strange coming from me; and it does seem strange to myself. How indifferent I used to be to all children, until I had children of my own! I remember I used to wonder how this and that cultivated, clever woman, could find any pleasure in remaining for an hour or two together

in company with a child ; could, if the child were her own, turn from the most eloquent, the wisest, the wittiest, to listen to its indistinct prattle.

“ At dinner I sat next Miss Hastings, and we spoke of London society.’ I was often astonished at the things she said. Of course one is accustomed to a clever, satirical, semi-philosophic view of fashionable society ; there is nothing extraordinary in *that*. Miss Hastings *can* take that view, too, I dare say ; but I can see that it is not habitual to her. She seems to have enlarged and deeply-fixed opinions on all the most important things in this life. These she does not parade before you at every sentence, but you feel that they are there, within her, keeping all her complicated and various minor thoughts and fancies in their right sphere, though they flash about brilliantly enough, there. She has a wonderful respect for Moral Principle, and I can see that it would be impossible for her to admire or love any person whose mind is not under its guidance. ‘ Does she want charity and a tolerant spirit ?’ I thought.

“ ‘ I hope you do not feel abhorrence of all

those persons who are unfortunate enough to have no steady principles of action?' I said.

"She replied (evidently without thinking of me), 'No, I only feel pity for them, and sometimes contempt.'

" 'Then,' said I, 'you never could make a friend of a person whose actions were guided by impulse.'

" 'No person acts only from good impulses,' she replied. 'If there were a human being who did right, instinctively, always, as the swallow builds her nest, I might feel reliance on his actions, as on a law of inanimate nature. It would be convenient, I grant; but I could not respect his mind as I must respect that of my *friend*. I would choose a friend who might sometimes do wrong from an error in judgment, or from a temporary weakness of will; but he must hold *this* doctrine,—that in all human conduct we should submit ourselves to the law of conscience, and do the right for no other reason than because it is the right. I should expect of my friend that he would act upon this doctrine.'

" 'And if your friend should disappoint your expectations, and, in some important act of

life, do the thing which his conscience did not approve? If he should be led by passion to set at naught his moral principle, would your friendship cease?' I asked that question earnestly, for, to say the truth, it has often puzzled me.

"Without any hesitation, in a calm, clear voice, as if her mind were long settled on that point, she replied, 'If it *could* cease then, I should be convinced that it had never been a real friendship. Forsake my friend because he erred! I should as soon think of forsaking his bedside because he had the small-pox.'

" 'Many people would argue that it was right to do both!' I said.

" 'I believe they would; but what of that? I am a little surprised to hear Lady Carleton give weight to such an authority? "Many people!"' and a droll, little smile curled her lip. 'Pray how many people may your ladyship have the good fortune to know whose arguments upon the duties of friendship you would consider worthy of serious attention?'

" 'About half a dozen,' I replied. It took me a very short time to calculate.

" 'And of that half dozen is there one who

would recommend you, for *your own* sake, to turn from another because he had erred?—If so, you will find no friendship in that man. He does not know what it is. Be sure that for *his own* sake he would forsake you when you, in your turn, stumble in the rough and perilous paths of life. This man may be estimable in many things—honest and truthful (as far as he can see and feel truth)—anxious to do right, too—as far as he is able,—a good and useful man. But he is not capable of friendship. He would not even recognise the fundamental characteristics of this rare blessing of human nature—self-sacrifice and generosity. What he means by friendship is what I, borrowing a term from a new school of philosophy, call “enlightened self-interest.”

“ ‘I do not quite understand. Of course you do not allude to mere time-serving, worldly friendships? You do not speak of people who keep what they call their *friends* as long as they can be useful to them in making their way in the world? Nor can you be speaking of those friendships of circumstance, in which people being much to-

gether, get accustomed to each other, and are *friends* as a matter of course.'

" 'No,' she said, 'I speak of a bond of union somewhat higher than these. There is a sort of friendship which has much that is pure and good in it, but which has self-interest in loving, instead of unconscious self-forgetfulness, as its mainspring. A man, anxious for his own moral well-being, sees qualities that he admires in another,—qualities that he would like to acquire or to increase in himself; he sees enough of this other to approve his conduct, his views in life, his general purposes and aspirations. He feels happy when he is with him, and has his best powers exercised then. Therefore, he says, "It is good for me to be here. This is the person I will make my friend." Mark! His argument is, "It is good for *me*—for *my* moral improvement—to be here." Not "Here is goodness! I must be where it is, that I may see it always. It is so lovely!" That is what I call *enlightened self-interest*. I have nothing to say against it; only it is *not* friendship. It is quite right that we should put ourselves always, if possible, in a healthy atmosphere

—our minds as well as our bodies. We should avoid the society of those who would have an evil influence, for the world-old reason, which the Apostle Paul states in so compendious a form that the shortest memory retains it — “ Evil communications corrupt good morals.” *A friend* must belong to that class of congenial and respected associates, but he must have something peculiar in his effect upon us, which the others need not have. Friendship is a spontaneous feeling—a passion,—not the effect of calculation,—any more than love. We love our friends (those of us who *can* love a friend) partly in the same way that a man loves a woman—with a faith and a passion consonant to reason, but not consciously directed by it.’

“ She paused, not as if she had exhausted herself, but as if she feared she had said enough. I wished to hear her further, and said—

“ ‘ You say, “ those of us who *can* love a friend,” and “ in the same way that a man loves a woman.”—Do you not think there are many who love a friend ? And does a man love a woman better than a woman loves a man ?’

“ ‘In the first place,’ she replied, ‘I believe that friendship is a very rare passion—very much rarer than love; that very few people *can* love a friend, while many can love a mistress or a wife very well indeed. As to a man’s love for a woman, I said *that*, rather than a woman’s for a man; because, in general, women’s love for men is only gratitude—it ? is not a spontaneous passion as the other is. But we have got to that subject which is said to be the end of all conversation among young women, married and single!—Suppose we change it.’

“ ‘As you please; only you must talk to me more about friendship when we have an opportunity. Tell me one thing now. Have *you* a friend?’

“ A slight flush came over her face, a blush of pleasure, as she said, softly, ‘Oh! yes. It would be dreary, indeed, to live without a friend! I am rich; I have two friends.’

“ ‘Are they men or women?’

“ ‘They are men. One is my brother Henry.’

“ ‘Did you not form other friendships, or what you called such, when you were a girl?’

“‘Oh! yes. I believe I was given to forming attachments of that kind.’

“‘And you found that you had made a mistake?—You must have suffered a good deal on those occasions.’

“‘I suffered intensely. The word is strong, but it is appropriate. In youth we are apt to do all things with our whole might. So I grieved over my false friendships. But this good has come out of that experience;—I know a true friend when I have found one, and I do not expect perfection in him;—I am contented to like people instead of loving them, and I have learned to think deeply about friendship, and to value it more than any blessing on earth.’

“‘More than love?’ I asked, in amazement.

“‘Love!’ and there was a slight contraction of the eyebrows. ‘That I have nothing to do with.’

“‘Pardon me. Every woman has to do with love. *You*, surely.’

“‘Yes. I once had thoughts on the subject—a long time ago. I have none now. If you want to talk of *love*, there’s Mrs. Grey yonder! I dare say she knows all about it. I am tired to death of the subject. Women

talk of little else. I prefer chemistry.' She rose, and took up a volume on that science.

"I felt inclined to tease her. 'Can you tell me anything about elective affinities?' I said.

"'Yes!' she said. 'They often end in smoke.'

"'What do you know of the attraction of repulsion?'

"'That it is in you.'

"'On your reputation as a chemist, tell me, do you think I am a simple volatile substance?' She laughed, and threw down the book. We talked till the carriage came. They all went to the gate with me. Miss Hastings wrapped a shawl over my head, and told me she should come to the castle in the morning. We parted well pleased with each other."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF SORROW.

"Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?"

ECCLESIASTES.

"The company of fools may at first make us smile, but at last never fails of rendering us melancholy."

GOLDSMITH.

I LEARN from the Countess Caroline's letters, and also from my aunt Margaret herself, that the day of her christening was long remembered as a sad one in the Earl of Carleton's family. On that day Arundel Raby for the first time showed symptoms of a disordered brain. When he was taken away from the company for his accustomed sleep after dinner, his maid placed him beside his brother on a bed. The little viscount was soon asleep; but Arundel lay for some time with wide-open eyes, staring

stupidly at the ceiling. There seemed to her something unnatural in his look, and fancying that he would go to sleep more easily if she took him in her arms, she leaned forward for the purpose of raising him. To her surprise, the child did not seem to know her, but started up furiously, and hit her a blow in the face. He then fell back in a convulsive fit. The poor girl was very much frightened, and ran out of the room to call for help. In the lobby she met Miss Hastings, who hearing what was the matter, returned with her to the child. As soon as she saw the little sufferer, she forbade the girl to alarm Lady Carleton or any one else in the house, and told her to bring a hot bath immediately. The terrified girl fetched the water, and poured it as she was ordered into a large foot-bath, and by the time she had done so, she found that Miss Hastings had contrived to get some of the clothes off the child. As soon as the bath was ready, she plunged him into the water and held him down. Poor Ann stood by trembling for the result. She has often described the circumstances attending that first attack to me since. In about five minutes the convulsions began to decrease in violence, and the child breathed

again naturally. Miss Hastings then asked Ann if she were afraid to hold him down in the water while she went away for a few moments? Ann replied that she was not. Miss Hastings then wiped the water hastily from her hands and dress, and left the chamber. She ran fast to the door of the drawing-room, but resumed her usual composed step as she entered it. She glanced round the room, and having satisfied herself that Lady Carleton was so near the beginning of a game at chess that she would not be likely to steal up-stairs to look at her children for, at least, half an hour, she made a sign to Miss Price that she wished to speak with her. That lady was quick enough in apprehension, but rather slow in movement, and Miss Hastings waited with impatience for two minutes, outside the door, before Miss Price joined her.

“Little Arundel is ill. Come with me ! Quick !” and Miss Hastings darted noiselessly up the stairs again. Miss Price used often to speak of the admiration she felt for the rapidity, energy, and perfect composure with which her friend (for she afterwards became her friend) did the right things in times of danger—or when circumstances required ex-

traordinary promptitude and decision. On the present occasion, however, Miss Price lost no time either, and followed Miss Hastings into the bedroom. The pale, weeping Ann, was sent to fetch a small medicine chest. The bath and friction restored the child's consciousness, and he smiled faintly in reply to some soft baby nonsense from Miss Hastings.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Miss Price, with tears in her eyes. "How shall we tell his mother?"

"We must be very careful how that is done," said Miss Hastings; "this is not an ordinary convulsive fit. If it be possible, keep this attack secret from her. I will call on you to-morrow, and explain my reasons for thinking this best. If it is as I fear, the child will quickly recover, and show no signs of having been ill. He will not remember it." When Ann returned, Miss Hastings sought out a particular medicine, and gave some to the child, who cried lustily;—which she seemed to approve. Some dry clothes belonging to one of the little Hastingses were found and put on while the wet ones were dried, but as his little frock had not been touched by the water, that was put on at once, lest his mother

should come in, and ask why his dress had been changed. When they had dried and arranged his hair, they laid him down on the bed beside his sleeping brother, and in five minutes he, too, was asleep. The bath was removed, the two ladies lingered about to see that all was as if nothing had happened, and then left the room.

As Miss Price took Miss Hastings' arm on her way to the drawing-room, she said in a low tone, "You think the child's brain is diseased?"

"I do; I thought so when I first saw him this morning."

"We all think him tolerably healthy, and certainly he is very intelligent for his age—much more so than his brother, though he is not so strong, physically."

"He is far too intelligent for his age. But we will talk of this to-morrow. I must see you alone, remember. Ann has promised not to mention what has just happened to her lady until we give her leave. Lord Merle—I mean the Earl of Carleton—ought to know of this, now he is in London. I will write to him."

"You?" asked Miss Price, who was a very

proper old lady, and scarcely thought it fit that a lady should write to any gentleman not of her own family. "Are you well acquainted with the earl?"

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Hastings; "that is, quite well enough to write a letter to him on a matter which I happen to know should not be spread abroad without his sanction. I shall not mention it to my brother or his wife."

Miss Price was much puzzled; and on her return to the drawing-room, tried to look as if she had nothing to trouble her. She had some conversation with Mrs. Grey; in the course of which that lady spoke, as most of the surrounding gentry did, when they went out visiting, of the castle and the Earl of Carleton's family.

"You know, ma'am, the present earl is quite a blessing to the whole county! Nobody expected it of him!—Brought up in that neglected way as he was, we feared he might turn out as bad as his father. When he first came to live here, we all thought he would break out in some way. I was almost afraid to let my husband go to call on him!—When he came home that day, I remember I said, 'Well, John, what do you think of him? Has he got

anything of the Wicked Earl about him?'—And John laughed, for he thought it was all curiosity, instead of real interest, and said, 'You may set your mind at ease;—and so may all the rest of the ladies! The Earl of Carleton is as sane as I am. He is a sensible, clever, business-like young man; and will soon have his estates in capital order!—I expect he will be as useful in this part of the world as his crack-brained father was mischievous. So, now, Mary, you can go and tell all the young ladies that they had better set their caps at the young earl, for he will be wanting a countess before long, I dare say!'—John was out *there*, though; for the earl was in no hurry for a wife. Indeed, I suppose there was one in reserve for him in his uncle's house all that time!—A beautiful creature—the countess!—You were her governess, I think, ma'am? Pray, may I ask if it was a long-standing engagement between her and the earl?"

"I never thought it part of my business as governess to ask," replied Miss Price, with her eyes fixed on her everlasting tatting. She was remarkably skilful in baffling curiosity and repressing impertinent people. Mrs. Grey, however, was tough, and went on.

“Oh! I beg your pardon, ma’am!—I do not ask from curiosity. I believe there never was a less curious person than myself. But I should be glad to be able to put a stop to the silly report that goes about that the earl was in love with Miss Hastings. (Don’t look up, ma’am, she is looking this way.) It is said that when he found she was carrying on a correspondence with another gentleman—a physician I heard—he broke off his engagement and married his cousin directly. Many a ball is caught in the rebound, you know. Now,—if I had it upon good authority that the earl was engaged to the countess for several years, that would effectually put a stop to the reports about him and Miss Hastings!”

“It might do so, perhaps,” said Miss Price; “but then it would deprive the neighbourhood of an excellent subject for their ingenuity and eloquence, which would be a pity. If that theme were taken out of their mouths, they would want a new one, and they might not get one half so fruitful in ill-nature and mischievous invention.”

“You are quite severe, I declare!” said Mrs. Grey.

“Don’t you think one ought to be se-

vere against evil-speaking, lying, and slandering?"

"Oh! but nothing of that kind goes on among us, I assure you!—We are not a scandal-loving community! And if you think there is no truth in the report about Miss Hastings and my lord Careleton—Now"—and here the accomplished gossip lowered her voice still more—"now, as you were the countess's governess, I feel sure I may tell you my own private feeling on this subject—I should be very sorry to have Miss Hastings in her place.—The countess is a favourite with everybody. Such a sweet creature! so young and pretty, and with such an air of fashion about her; then she is so affable and condescending; and talks to every one so pleasantly. Miss Hastings, though she is only a merchant's daughter, carries herself very high; she will scarcely condescend to open her lips to one. She is a very superior woman, very learned and accomplished, and all that—but there is something about her I don't like. I'm sure she thinks a great deal of herself!—Now, don't you think so?"

"On the contrary—judging from the little

I have seen, I should say she does not think so much of herself as others think of her."

"Well! I am glad to hear you say that! I did not speak from my own feeling. I only repeated what others say. And people are very apt to find fault, you know. Miss Hastings is so like her brother (what a dear man he is!), that it would quite hurt my feelings to think ill of her. There can be no doubt that she is a very superior woman!"

The countess passed close by, at this moment, on her way towards the door. The affectionate old lady guessed whither she was bound, and trying to smile, said, "They are both asleep; but don't forget to tell nurse to have them ready at seven o'clock! The carriage will be here;—and I think I will go with them. They have had rather more excitement than usual to-day, and I should like to see them comfortably in bed."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, my dear Miss Price!—They are perfectly well! they want no one but the nurses to take them home. I will trust them without either you or me for three hours. Never scold me about over-anxiety and fussiness again!" And she

patted Miss Price's shoulder playfully, and left the room.

Mrs. Grey was enthusiastic. "What a charming creature! How fond you must be of her! I declare I never saw any one with such pretty, fascinating ways! And her lovely children, too! Quite pictures! How proud and fond of them she must be!—And the earl, too—what a happy man! It is quite enough to look at those noble twins to see that there is no fear of hereditary disease there. Indeed, as my husband says, there never was a man more in his right mind than the present earl. And, perhaps, his father was never really mad; it might have been nothing but a dreadful temper and a good deal of *eccentricity*. You know, all the Rabys, for the last hundred years, have been very odd, and *some* have been quite mad. My husband has studied the family history a good deal. He says the Rabys have all been naturally very clever, and having had stupid people to deal with, and uncontrolled power to deal with them, they have, as a matter of course, been often half mad with anger. But the present earl is very good-tempered, I am sure; and the children look like little angels,—especially

the viscount. Do you know, I think there is a touch of the old earl about little Master Arundel. Something in the eyes. Very fine eyes they are, to be sure; but a little wild!—Don't you think so?"

"Think what?" asked Mr. Hastings, who, seeing Miss Price evince unmistakable signs of impatience under the terrible infliction of Mrs. Grey's long tongue, came forward benevolently, to victimise himself and allow her to escape.

"Can there be any truth in the things that silly woman says?" was a question which haunted Miss Price all that evening and the next day, till she saw Miss Hastings come to the castle.

CHAPTER VI.

A MORNING VISIT AND A WOMAN'S MISSION.

“Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur—other gifts
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense.”

WORDSWORTH.

“THERE is a property of good in all things evil,” said Miss Hastings to her sister-in-law at breakfast, the day after the christening, *à propos* of that lady's complaint that “Lady Carleton still retained one of her evil London habits, and never left her dressing-room till twelve o'clock.”

“Why, what good can you possibly see in that ?” asked Mrs. Hastings.

“This good : that I wish to learn something more of Miss Price than I could do, except *en tête-à-tête* ; and if I go up to the castle by

eleven o'clock, I shall have an hour's talk with her before I see lady Carleton."

"Unless she is too fatigued by Mrs. Grey's chatter yesterday, you will probably find Miss Price quite ready to have a talk with you," said her brother.

Miss Hastings set off to walk to the castle alone. She laughed at Mrs. Hastings' fears that she would be alarmed at the red deer, or dislike the feeling of being alone.

As she proceeded across the park she stopped often to gaze from the tops of the wood-crowned eminences. Many a view seemed quite familiar to her, though she had never been at Carleton before. They brought back to remembrance the days when they had been described to her so eloquently, that this, the reality, seemed but a shadow of that description. There came also to her mind a sweeter and bitterer recollection—a recollection of whispered hopes that she might one day stand, as she did then, on these hills, and say: "Yes, this is just what you told me!" And those words then came to her lips.

"Yes, this is just what he told me!"—The scene was, indeed, the same as her lover had depicted, but under what different circum-

stances from those fondly dreamed by both, did she now gaze on it !—Alas ! For the vanished hopes of youth ! He was not there, to say “ All that you see is yours—is *ours*.” He was not there to fling a glory over all she looked upon. He was now nothing to her but a recollection—a volume of sweet thoughts and fair imaginings, which had been taken from her, and which was now irrevocably gone.

“ Gone !—Alone !—Always alone ! ”—How often, in the dull sleeplessness of night, did those words ring through the soul of Margaret Hastings ! She had learned to stifle the dreary echo they made there.—Now, as she stood leaning against an oak tree, to note the varied beauty that spread around her, these words seemed to creep through her veins : “ *Gone !—Gone !—Alone !—Always alone !* ”

She looked at the noble castle—the emblem of power and social greatness—of memorable times and memorable men—the fountain from which high ensamples and gracious help flowed down to the world around. “ I might have been a queen there ! ”—she thought. “ More than that—I might have devoted my life to him—my heart’s dearest treasure !—I might have made him and myself happy ! ”

“ Yes,” whispered an evil spirit within, “ and why did you not ? Because you sought to raise yourself above the generality of women. And in what have you been above them ?— You bowed down before a chimera you called *Right* ;—which was nothing but the fear of a remote possibility ; and you gave love, and pity, and generosity, and true womanly nature to the winds.”

“ Down !—Demon, down ! I will not hear you. It is false ! false ! I am weak now, but you shall not overcome me !—Have I wrestled with you so often and gained the mastery, to be conquered now ?” And the strong woman sought more strength where alone she had ever found it.

Lowly kneeling on the mossy root of that old tree whose struggles with ten thousand storms had made him nobler and better fitted for his maker’s purpose, she prayed that God would help her to resist the wickedness of her own heart, and to do bravely and unselfishly the work allotted to her that day. The winds sang a *Benedicite* above her head, and she rose up calm and refreshed ! Margaret Hastings, the world, who knew you not, said you were *hard* ! It would be a blessing for the

world if more women hardened themselves in this fashion !

On she went, with a steady, gliding step, over the sunny grass ; soothing her perturbed soul with the music-wisdom of an old poet :*

“ Knowing the heart of man is set to be
The centre of this world, about the which
These revolutions of disturbances
Still roll ; where all the aspects of misery
Predominate ; whose strong effects are such
As he must bear, being powerless to redress ;
And that unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man ! ”

It was the middle of July, and the lime-trees were in blossom.—All along that glorious avenue they shook out their perfume as she passed ; and Miss Hastings, in whose nature nothing was defective ; who, far from despising, cherished pure sensation, as she cherished the intellectual faculty within her, felt her spirits rise and her step become more buoyant under the gladdening influence of the rich summer-time.

She arrived at the castle ;—and the question then was, how to get in. On that side there seemed no entrance ; all the windows, too, were shut up—it was evidently uninhabited.

* Daniel. Epistle to the Countess of Cumberland.



There was a broad terrace here, and the view from it was magnificent. As she passed before a large bow-window of one of the deserted rooms, she thought within herself: "If I lived here, I would have *this* for my morning room!"—And that room became, in after years, the one with which the reader is already familiar—her new-born niece's, *my* aunt Margaret's parlour.

Finding that she could not gain admission on this side, she turned a corner of the building, and stood in the great front court, with its fountain designed by the celebrated Bernini.

As Miss Hastings cared for art as well as nature, she stopped to examine the fountain, and found that it was as fine a work as it was reported to be. Then she turned round to inspect the front of the castle. It was massive and grey; a large central building, flanked by two great turreted towers. In the middle a broad flight of steps led to the great hall-door. One valve was open, and she passed through it into the hall. No one was there.—Miss Hastings was not in a hurry, and set herself to examine that beautiful hall while she waited for the appearance of a servant. It was then,

as it was in my time, light and very lofty ;—paved with alternate squares of black and white marble. It had large gothic windows, looking into the front court, partially adorned with painted glass, on which the escutcheon of the family was repeated many times. The double staircase, with its carved oak balustrades, sprang up, with wonderful lightness of effect, from the two sides near the further end of the hall, and after one or two smaller landing-places, reached its point of junction, a handsome gallery immediately facing the entrance ;—upon this gallery one or two doors opened, leading into the upper corridors. It was from this gallery, the reader may remember, that I obtained my first view of the hall, on the morning after my arrival at Carleton. It was used as a music-gallery in the days of James and Charles I., when masques were often performed by the younger members of the family, with their aristocratic, and sometimes *royal*, guests ; for if the records of Peter Merrie, chaplain to Arundel, fourth Baron Carleton, speak truth, her Majesty Queen Anne (of Denmark) took part in divers masques and mummeries in the hall of the castle ;—the sapient King James himself

being among the admiring spectators.—I have forgotten to say that griffins, with gilded balls clasped between their fore-claws, the crest of the Raby family, figured in every available part of the architecture. Two huge griffins, in granite, flanked the great, yawning chimney; and, two and two, they guarded the bottom of each flight of stairs. There was a billiard-table on one side, which looked quite diminutive in that large area; oak settles stood by the chimney, and several throne-like chairs, to each of which some history was attached, stood in the recesses of the windows. Miss Hastings' eyes looked approval on the great hall. It was just what she expected to find it.

Still no servant came. She stepped back into the court-yard, and looked up at the front of the building to see if there were any signs of life about the place. At an open window adorned with flower-pots, high up in one of the towers, she saw a green watering-pot in a yellowish little hand, and above it, the white cap and peaceful face of Miss Price. The visitor soon found means to attract her attention. "How am I to get up to you?" she asked. "Your bower seems inaccessible."

"I will send some one to you," was the reply; and the white cap disappeared. After waiting a few minutes longer, a very lordly footman came to the hall, and conducted Miss Hastings up the great staircase to the north tower, where Miss Price's apartments were situated.

"How is the child this morning?" inquired Miss Hastings, when the two had seated themselves on either side of the open window.

"Quite well. Indeed, better than he has been for the last fortnight. Every one had noticed a depression about him, I hear. To-day he seems quite recovered."

Miss Hastings thought *that* quite in the course of nature, and said so. The thing to be done now, was to try to prevent a recurrence of these attacks, or if that could not be prevented, to mitigate them.

Poor Miss Price looked agitated. Bending forward gently, and laying her thin hand on her visitor's, she said, with tears in her eyes, in a low, fearful voice, "Do you think that the sweet boy will grow up insane?"

Miss Hastings took the trembling hand and pressed it silently.

"But tell me what ground you have for

fearing this. His parents are both remarkable for intellectual vigour. At all events, the earl is. I never saw a man superior in mind to Lord Carleton." The hand was slightly pressed again. "I never heard of any insanity in the family."

"Probably not ;—*because* you have lived in it. Lady Morton would not think it well to allow the insanity, which she knew to exist in her father's family, to become a theme of conversation in her own. You are aware that my brother and Lord Merle—I mean, the present Earl of Carleton—have been friends from childhood, and that there are no secrets of the Raby family hidden from ours. Insanity, in various forms and degrees, is hereditary in it, as in many other ancient houses. It is impossible to read the family history for the last hundred years and not be convinced of this. Those who have studied the mysterious laws by which hereditary disease works, have observed that the scourge often passes over one generation, or touches it so slightly as to be scarcely perceptible, and then reappears in the next with pristine, and if other causes are favourable to its growth, in

increased, force. To go no further back than the late earl—the *wicked earl*, as he is popularly called—he was partially insane during the greater part of his life, and he died raving mad. This is the account given to his son by the English physician and the foreign servants who were with him during his last illness.

“ In all cases, even those freest from hereditary disease, the marriage of near kindred—especially so near as cousins-german—should be avoided. In every family there are peculiar weaknesses and tendencies to disease, which, if its members intermarry, are *sure* to appear in an aggravated form in their offspring. The Earl of Carleton married his first cousin—a beautiful, clever, and, to all appearance, a perfectly sane and healthy girl ; yet I cannot forget that she is his insane father’s sister’s child, and that the laws of nature are no respecters of persons. Her first child died in Rome soon after its birth—it was impossible that it could live. These twins, now nearly two years of age, are remarkably fine children. They deserve all the praise I have heard of them. I do not wonder that their mother’s life is one waking dream of maternal love !

How would she look if you were to go to her and say, 'Your beautiful children may grow up unsightly idiots, miserable lunatics!'"

"My poor, poor child!" murmured the old governess. "My sweet, charming Caroline! If it should be thus, may God strengthen you to bear your cruel fate!—But surely you exaggerate! there must be some mistake!—Would her own mother have forced on this match (as, I know, she did)?—would her father have allowed it? Would they have suffered this marriage to take place if they had known, if they had even remotely suspected, these facts?"

"Yes; on account of the earldom and forty thousand a year!—On this account would both fathers and mothers, like Sir Joseph and Lady Morton, steadfastly ignore, wilfully disbelieve, never take the pains to investigate, the truth! They do not bear in mind that awful threat—carried out through all nature: '*I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.*' And such parents do hate God, for they worship the World, and sacrifice their own children to Mammon—with such result as this!"

"You are severe, Miss Hastings."

"I am, if to speak the truth be to be severe."

"But why, if you condemn Sir Joseph and Lady Morton, are you silent on the subject of the earl's fault—I had well-nigh said *crime*? He, too, must have known that, in all probability, he entailed a miserable life upon his offspring when he married, and that he doomed his wife to bitter pain and disappointment. Why do you not blame *him*?"

"I do blame him. I think his conduct quite unjustifiable; although some excuse may be found for it, perhaps, if we were to give him a hearing. But it is useless for our purpose, now, to blame any one. We shall certainly not make the countess's pain less by criminating her husband. It is to save her all pain on this subject as long as we can; and, at the same time, to arrange a plan for proper medical treatment of the child, that I have sought a private interview with you.—The attack last night, coming, as you now tell me it did, after many days of depression and lowness of spirits, is, I have no doubt, the first outbreak of this awful disorder."

"You may be mistaken. Children often have convulsive fits without growing up insane!" said Miss Price, who was anxious to persuade herself that it was so.

"Not of the peculiar kind we saw yesterday. *That* was caused by organic disorder of the brain."

"You speak as if you had studied the subject!"

"I am interested in this 'worst ill that flesh is heir to.' For the last ten years I have pursued the study of nervous and cerebral disease as well as a woman can. I have read many books in various languages on insanity and mental debility, in all their branches—from slight monomania, and what is commonly called weakness of brain, to frenzy and imbecility. I have had the advantage of intimate acquaintance with a physician who has devoted his life to the study of this branch of his profession. From his experience I have learned much; under his guidance, I have myself been of use in mitigating evil in very many cases. I have visited hospitals and lunatic asylums with him. I have not shrunk from the sight of the most painful forms of insanity."

"What a dreadful occupation!" exclaimed good Miss Price.

"Yes; I believe most people consider me half mad for taking so much interest in mad people!" replied Miss Hastings with a sad smile.

"Is it solely from taste that you employ yourself thus?" asked Miss Price, whose curiosity and good sense were being roused, in an equal degree, by her visitor.

Miss Hastings smiled again. "Partly from taste (if you like to call it so) and partly from principle. I believe every unmarried woman ought to have some regular employment, if it be only to keep her out of harm; for 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands and heads to do.' Married women have plenty of business ready prepared to their hand,—if they will only do it—better still,—if they follow the Apostle's injunction, and 'do it with all their might.' Unmarried women have the disadvantage of a wider choice; for it is a serious evil that they *can* raise a doubt as to whether this or that is their proper work. For my own part, I was led on by degrees to take an active part in the treatment of mental disease in my own neighbourhood. Many circumstances conspired to make me take an

interest in mental derangement. It was a fearful, terrific interest at first. In time, Dr. Ward induced me to read books on this subject, under his direction, and from them I learned how slowly and insidiously this evil grows, and how very wide-spread it is. He found me useful. Indeed, as it is so rare a thing to find a woman of my position with spare time and some knowledge of the disease, able and willing to work under him, he was glad to secure my services; and as he is an old friend of my father's, and a person of high character and refinement, no one at home raised any objection to my visiting lunatic asylums with the doctor, and reading as much as he pleased about mental disease. Children liable to become imbecile or insane I have helped to improve, and if I have not always made them wiser, I have certainly made them happier. If I am not mistaken, Arundel Raby's will be one of those rare cases of mental disease which are the most painful to the sufferer, the most difficult to treat, and by far the most touching to witness. For years he will give no indication of cerebral derangement;—he will show extraordinary mental capacity and high moral qualities;—

he may be foremost in school and college. As he grows to manhood and maturity he will probably exhibit brilliant flashes of genius—he may even be remarkable for steadiness of mind—for acute logical power and mathematical talent ; for an almost unerring judgment, and the soundest sense in practical matters. In short, he may have all the qualities requisite to make him a distinguished statesman, poet, philosopher, scientific investigator, or general scholar.”

“ If that be the case,” interrupted Miss Price, “ what makes you say he will grow up insane ?”

“ Because, if there is organic disease in the brain, he will hold these noble gifts by a very uncertain tenure. They may be totally obscured for months, and perhaps years of mental darkness, during which he will suffer much. His life will alternate between seasons of intellectual brightness and vigour and others of insanity and extreme mental depression, during which he will not, alas ! be totally unconscious of the change in himself ; but will suffer acutely from *the knowledge* that he has lost his reason.”

“ This is so new, so astounding, so dread-

ful," said Miss Price, "that you must excuse me if I hesitate to give credence to it immediately. I see that you have much reason to support your opinion; but some medical advice——"

"It must be had. *Some*—but not *any*. This is not a case to be trifled with."

"The countess's usual attendant, Dr. C——, from P——."

"Not to be trusted in the present case. Tell me one thing. You know Lady Carleton well. She appears amiable, and is decidedly clever and full of thought. Has she strength of mind to bear the whole of this painful truth? Remember what it is.—It involves her father and mother in an accusation of culpable neglect, in not stating to her the true nature of her marriage—even of something worse than *neglect*. Her husband it shows as a base, unmanly deceiver;—one who took advantage of her ignorance to make her miserable for life, that he might gratify his selfish ambition, and have an heir to his old title and large estates. After glowing with indignation at what, if she have a spark of honourable feeling, she must consider as the most wretched trick;—after seeing that

there is—there can be, no redress for her ;—after having her pride crushed and her love for both parents and husband thus outraged—a deep grief, perhaps the deepest, remains behind ;—her children, her heart's dearest treasures—upon them, upon their innocent heads, will the curse descend. She will have to live in daily dread of this—perhaps to see them idiots, or raving mad ! Say—is she strong enough to have all her earthly happiness taken from her at one stroke, and yet live to perform the arduous duties which will then remain to her ?”

“ No, no !” and Miss Price spoke imploringly. “ Spare her this ! She need not know all—or perhaps any of it, yet. She is so young—so unacquainted with sorrow ! Tell Caroline that her husband has deceived her cruelly—that her children are likely to be insane ! why, I would not answer for her life a week !”

“ We must conceal it from her, then, as long as possible.”

“ But you say something must be done for the child ? What can we do ?”

“ There should be no delay in that. I will write to Dr. Ward, and tell him to commu-

nicate with the earl immediately, and to accompany him *as a visitor* to the castle. While he is here, you and the earl must contrive that he have every opportunity of observing the two children, and of questioning their nurses. *His* opinion the earl will trust, I know; and upon his advice, you and the children's nurses, and their mother, too (if she can bear it without raising her suspicion), must act implicitly."

"It is very kind in you," sobbed Miss Price, "to take so much interest in these sweet babes; but I cannot wonder at it, they are so beautiful and interesting. Poor little lambs!—You do not think there is anything the matter with the viscount?"

"No! He seems to me to be a healthy child; the brain is not too active in his case; and from many things about him, I judge that he is less likely than his brother to be attacked by disease, mental or physical."

"Would you like to see them this morning? I will ring for them."

"No, thank you—better not!"—and when Miss Price looked at her visitor, she saw that she was very pale.

"You look exhausted; you are tired with

your walk.—No! you suffer for your kind interest in others.” And the tearful old lady wiped her eyes again, and then kissed Miss Hastings’ broad forehead and smoothed her hair;—she had taken off her bonnet.

“ Yes,” replied Miss Hastings, somewhat mournfully. “ We must weep with them that weep!—And you, too,—are you less angry than you were awhile since? Do you forgive me for coming with strange and apparently unfeeling words to throw down your castle of Hope and Joy—in which you expected to pass the remaining years of your life? Do not think I have not looked well at the pain I should inflict. But tell me, is it not better that I should have told you? That you should devote your time and thought henceforward to softening the affliction of this family, rather than that you should take no part in it? The countess wants a friend, *now*, more than ever. Sooner or later, she must know all — if she live; and will it not be a blessing to you to know that you have done all in your power to mitigate her child’s sufferings? I saw yesterday that yours was no time-serving, self-interested attachment; I was convinced that you loved her;

I guessed from your position here that you had no nearer and dearer ties ; and, therefore, that you would think it your duty, as well as your pleasure, to devote yourself to this unhappy family. Am I right ?”

“ You are. If Lady Carleton is——” She was interrupted by the entrance of a servant, to say that her ladyship would be glad to see Miss Hastings.

CHAPTER VII.

A PEEP AT THE COUNTESS IN PRIVATE.

"Not a glance may wander there
But it lights on something fair."

MISS JEWSBURY.

"I will chide no breather in the world but myself, against whom I
know most faults."

As You Like It.

LADY CARLETON's private apartments were those in the south corridor, occupied in my childhood by her son, Mr. Arundel Raby ; and her *boudoir*, or private sitting-room, was the one I have already spoken of, where I was allowed to breakfast for the first time with him and my aunt Margaret. Some forty years before that event of my childhood, my great-aunt paid her first and last visit to the Countess Caroline, in that same apartment.

The same, but yet how different !—At that time it had been recently fitted up for the

reception of a young and happy wife. Rose-coloured window-hangings, while they shut out the too great brightness of the sun's rays, cast a beautiful glow over the room. Gems of the Italian painters hung on the walls; tables and shelves laden with the wonderful porcelain of the East and of the West lurked in every available corner; for my Lady Carleton had the fashionable taste of her day, and had lavished large sums upon china vases and monsters, Raffael ware, Palissy ware, old Sèvres and Dresden. During her life she retained this taste—it did not pass from her even when misfortune pressed heavily. The taste for old china may be considered a frivolous one by many persons, but I have never been able to look upon it with contempt, since I have heard how much pleasure it gave to the Countess Caroline. Her mother, it seems, was one of the leaders of the fashion in this matter, and used to take her daughters about with her to the India shops. Lady Morton had a valuable collection of genuine Chinese vases; not so large, perhaps, as those famous ones belonging to the porcelain king, but large enough to excite the envy of half her pottery-loving acquaintance—the witty *dilettante*,

Horace Walpole, at their head. The Mortons were frequent visitors at Strawberry Hill; and Caroline was its owner's favourite, because she had his own love of pretty things, besides being a pretty thing herself. Mr. Horace Walpole made her a connoisseur in porcelain and pottery; and when, on her marriage with her wealthy cousin, she began to form a collection, he assisted her with his judgment in making purchases, and gave her two famous Palissy dishes as a wedding present. The countess spent a great deal of money on her collection, which though not very large, is valuable, as I am informed by those who understand these matters. This collection of porcelain is shown among the curiosities of Carleton Castle. Besides devoting a great deal of money, the Countess Caroline is said to have devoted a great deal of time to collecting and arranging these articles of *vertù*. Before the birth of her children, she spent an hour or two every morning in dusting, arranging, studying, and cataloguing her treasures. She would not allow a servant to touch them, for a reason I found recorded in one of her letters to her sister.

“Do you remember,” she writes, “when

poor Jackson let fall mamma's love of a Majolica vase, and broke it into five hundred pieces? What a rage she was in! She turned away the poor creature,—after calling her a great many unpleasant names, and could never be persuaded to take her back. I know I thought at the time that she richly deserved the punishment. As poor old Lord Orford said on the occasion, 'it would argue great want of proper feeling and taste to forgive such an awkward wretch. Her act belonged to the class of things *qui ne se pardonnent pas*.' Perhaps he was satirical; but, at the time, I really believed mamma was right; and took his lordship *au pied de lettre*. I think so differently now! I have become quite a thoughtful moralist since Frederick and I were married. You know he always was an insufferably correct and moral boy! He is just the same as ever; only a trifle worse, *i.e.* better; and is actually making me as good as himself!—In consequence of living continually with this person, I am beginning to take heed to my ways. I see it is not proper to fly into a passion, even about anything so momentous as an egg-shell teacup. I had one of those little darlings

broken the other day by my maid, and I felt a very strong inclination to break her head in return.—That does not sound pretty; but it is the truth!—Frederick happened to hear me storming, and was much shocked, I am sure. The more so as I remained in a vile temper the rest of the day. He was very kind, I will say *that* for him! He said nothing about having overheard my angry speeches; he seemed not to notice my sullenness, and treated me as if I had been as amiable as usual. In the evening, when I sat down to work and he took a book to read to me, he selected the ‘Rape of the Lock.’ How witty it is! My temper soon recovered. You know how charmingly Frederick reads. I was quite delighted, and forgot all my grief of the forenoon. At last he came to the line

‘And mistress of herself though china fall.’

I wish you could have seen the serio-comic glance the man let fall on me over the top of the book. I could not help laughing; nor could I help starting up and giving him a pat on the cheek for his impertinence. I gained nothing by that move, you may be sure, but a variety in the impertinence. Afterwards we

had a little talk about getting into a passion. Frederick has a perfect horror of anything of the kind, and alluded to the days of his childhood, when he saw so many awful exhibitions of a passionate temper. You know mamma once told us that his father was a very violent man, and got into the most dreadful furies about nothing. Somehow, I have always hated the very name of my uncle. He was a brute, I am sure. Now, you see it would be very hard for poor Frederick if his wife were to get into dreadful furies about what he would call nothing, and thus repeat the unhappiness of his childhood. I thought over this the next morning, and determined not to get into a passion again. But as I knew well enough that I could not, like Pope's perfect woman, be

'Mistress of myself though china fall,'

I made a wise resolution not to allow any one to handle my collection but myself, in future. Frederick says I shall soon be a saint if I set to work to cure my faults in this style. But really one ought not to get into rages. It is very wicked, I do believe. Poor Price used to tell me so—often enough, I remember. I

suppose my temper is naturally very violent, for papa says that I am 'every inch a Raby,' and am not at all like the Mortons."

* * * * *

Only a few of the most beautiful specimens of the various kinds of porcelain in her collection were selected to adorn the countess's sitting-room. The others had a room to themselves; which she kept carefully locked, lest an intrusive cat, or child, or servant should commit havoc there. Besides Italian pictures and old china, the pretty rose-coloured room boasted furniture of a costly kind, and generally a profusion of fresh-cut hot-house flowers, in vases, which saturated the air with their luscious perfume.

Miss Hastings had time to give one comprehensive glance around before the countess raised her eyes from the letter she was writing. She looked very lovely, in a flowing white wrapper of Indian muslin, and a simple-looking, but very costly, little cap of Mechlin lace, tied in a semi-puritan, semi-coquettish fashion under the sweet little chin. Lady Carleton was no exception to the general rule that a taste for good china and a taste for good lace go together. She sat sideways, near an

open window, on a couch, with a knee-hole desk of the finest marqueterie before her. She held a pen in one hand, and was writing very rapidly; the elbow of the other arm rested on the desk, and the hand supported the side of her head as she wrote.

“How pretty! How unconscious! How full of life! and what perfect grace!” thought Miss Hastings. “He *must* love her!”

Thus far I have derived my account of Miss Hastings’ visit to the castle, which might have been her own, from other sources. I shall now have recourse again to Lady Carleton’s letters. In one of these she speaks, in detail, of this visit.

“This morning Miss Hastings came to see me; or, rather, to see Miss Price and me, for she spent an hour with Miss Price before I was informed of her arrival. You need not fear that my head will be turned by what you call that ‘undue reverence for rank which is so prevalent among provincials.’ Every person whose respect and good opinion I care a groat about, is sure to give my old governess precedence of me. This serves to keep my pride down. It is only the ignorant and the *parvenus* round about who fall down and

worship '*my* ladyship.' When I am with them I make a point of treating Miss Price with the most dutiful respect. The other day I made Mrs. Grey, a county member's wife, stare, by declining an invitation to a *fête*, 'because I did not like to leave Miss Price alone; and I felt sure that she could not be persuaded to accompany me to any but a very select party.' This was because the woman had sailed past the dear old lady without noticing her. I wish you could have seen her puzzled face! I do love to mystify a vulgarian! It is the only worldly pleasure I have left. It is a great mistake to suppose that all people born and bred in the country are simple-minded, innocent, and unworldly. I find my country neighbours as arrant worldlings, in grain, as my town ones—and without their polish. I keep out of society as much as possible; for, instead of amusing, it gives me a pain in my temper. The people are so awfully uncharitable—so contemptibly petty! The women hereabouts don't read or cultivate themselves in any way. They know nothing, and seem to care about nothing but backbiting each other. The common expression of their faces is indiffer-

ence or stupidity, and they only brighten up into intelligence and warm into feeling, when they have something ill-natured to say of anybody,—especially if that body be a stranger in these parts, and at all superior to themselves. Miss Hastings, for instance, is just the sort of woman to stir up all the female bile in the neighbourhood. I'd wager my life there is not a thing she does, not a word she says, that the Carleton and P—— society do not lay hold of and twist into the strangest signification. Her dress, her manner of entering a room, the way she fixes her eyes upon any one who speaks to her—'even upon *gentlemen*'—I have already heard spoken of as something 'very strange'—'altogether,' &c.

"I was so absorbed in writing to Frederick when she was shown in, that I did not hear or see the door open. When I happened to raise my eyes I found her standing in the middle of the floor looking at me. How long she had been there I cannot tell. As soon as she was seated I saw that she looked ill; as if something had occurred to agitate her. I thought it was the long walk, and made her lie down on a couch. There is certainly

something very attractive in her face! Do you remember some lines of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (I think), addressed ‘*To a Pale Beauty*?’ I could not help thinking of them as I looked at my visitor. But she is not *beautiful*, remember! We did not fall as naturally and easily into conversation as we had done the day before. There seemed to be some cloud over Miss Hastings’ mind. There was something of the kind over mine.—I do not think I am jealous. But, as I looked at her, I could not help feeling that if a man loved such a woman at all, it would be *passionnément, éperdûment, et pour toujours!* She allowed me to scrutinise her without showing the least uneasiness. I sat on a low seat, and she lay with her head resting on the arm of the sofa, with her face inclined towards me and facing the light. Now, Frederick is in the habit of resting himself on that same sofa and in that same attitude. I felt strongly tempted to say so.

“What self-command she has! She looked at me with perfect composure, and replied:

“‘Indeed! and, when he lies here, do you put yourself at his feet, in that way,—like a good child?’ And she smiled a smile like a

Frenchwoman, *fin* and full of pretty *malice*—but with nothing *malicious* about it.

“ I could not feel angry ; but I felt *caught* ; and trying to laugh it off, said : ‘ Not always !—sometimes we change places. He sits here and I lie there.’ ”

“ ‘ Satisfactory ; as far as it proves a reciprocity of taste in lounging and low seats, and a sort of conjugal equality which it is delightful to hear of. But, my dear Lady Carleton, you must pardon me ; if your husband ever sits upon that little stool he must look supremely ridiculous—his legs are so long !’ ”

“ In spite of myself I could not help laughing. Yet I felt nettled. It was clear that she did not mean me to see how her heart was affected, if it were affected at all, and that she had no intention of making or receiving any *confidences*.

“ She went on, ‘ I see that you, like my sister-in-law, have unconsciously slidden into the country fashion of talking to strangers about what is most interesting to you—your own domestic circles—your husbands—their peculiarities and their perfections infinite. Sophia talks to me of Henry, Henry, Henry,

as if I did not know him as well as she does ! Now, I expected better things from you. You *can* talk of something besides your husband and your children !

“ ‘Thank you for the implied compliment,’ I replied. ‘But, if I speak the truth honestly, there are no topics of conversation I find so agreeable, when with a friend. You must, therefore, forgive my mistake. I really forgot that we never met till yesterday.’

• ‘She smiled, and said, ‘I believe I deserved that. But the fact is, ever since I came to my brother’s house I have been bored to death with domesticities. Do have the charity to give me a little general information ; a little pleasant talk, not personal ! What a lovely picture !—A Guido, is it not ?’ and her eye rested on my beautiful Madonna.

“ ‘Yes ; we brought it from Florence.’

“ ‘Florence !—Ah ! you were there. I have been in Florence, too. Henry and I were in Italy together, long ago.’

“ ‘Did you go merely for the pleasure of travelling ?’ I asked.

“ ‘Oh, no ; I had had an illness. The doctors talked a great deal of nonsense, and sent me to Italy as the only means of saving my

life. I should have recovered just as well in England, I have no doubt. However, I am grateful to the profession for my three years in glorious Italy. Do you remember the road from Lucca to Florence ?

“ And then we had a very interesting conversation concerning our respective experiences in Italy. I told her of our purchases—Frederick’s of old pictures, and mine of porcelain. I took her to see my collection, with which she seemed pleased. Her mother is fond of porcelain, and on that account Miss Hastings has studied the subject. She knows more about the history of the art than I do, I suspect. She told me a good deal about Palissy. He is a great favourite of hers. It was reading an old French book about Palissy that first made her take a real interest in pottery, she says. She ‘felt sure that there must be something in an art to which a man like Palissy would sacrifice everything but principle and honour.’

“ ‘But,’ I argued, ‘Palissy sacrificed the comfort of his wife and children. He was selfish.’

“ ‘No,’ she replied, quickly, and I saw the colour come into her pale face ; ‘do not say

that. You are capable of knowing and feeling better. Genius is never *selfish*; that is, in the *bad* sense of that word. The egotism of genius is spiritual, not sensual; divine, not worldly. Poor Palissy! Though his department of art was not very high, he had real genius. Do you think *he* did not feel for the wife and children who wanted food, while he broke up the furniture to feed his furnace? I will not exculpate him by saying it was for *them* he toiled and suffered privation—that for them he pursued his experiments into the very Cave of Despair—lighted only by the hope of scientific truth. It was not for *them*, primarily—not for any human interest that he toiled, and thought, and starved his frail bodily tenement, it was for the sake of *truth*—of the *discovery* he had to make. He felt *that* as an imperial duty calling him onward, and he dared not disobey its voice.'

“ ‘ If I had been his wife I should have hated him! The cold-hearted man, who lived only for a scientific discovery, and let his wife and children starve!’ said I, with some warmth. ‘ If he was so entirely devoted to his dishes and furnaces, what business had he with wife

or child? It seems to me, that there are many men who should not marry.'

"She glanced at me gravely, and then said, 'Perhaps you are right; men with a genius for the investigations of science—for instance, *might*——'

" 'Oh!' said I, 'no man of genius should marry. What business have poets, painters, musicians with wives?'

" 'To love and to be loved by,' she replied, 'They, less than ordinary men, can dispense with sweet human love. They must always love.'

" 'I have no objection to that,' I replied. 'Let them be in love as much as they like; but their love should always be unfortunate, and generally unrequited. It develops their genius, you know! As they live but for the development of their genius, why should they marry and render a woman wretched by showing how little they care for her, how insignificant she is to them, when she ceases to inspire poems, and pictures, and music?—I think men of genius should never marry.' She was silent. 'Why do you not combat my opinion?' I asked. 'I am sure you do not agree with me.'

“ ‘I do not agree with what you have just now said; and if I thought it was your real opinion, I might attempt to combat it. Men of genius should not marry, you say. But how are you to prevent women—generally the best women—from falling in love with men of genius? Women are apt to love, to worship, to adore those divinely gifted sons of earth. The purer their own hearts, the more entirely will they give themselves up to the worship of genius. Their love is spontaneous, disinterested; they ask no joy beyond that of devoting their lives to the service of the great man in whose eyes they have found favour. Men of genius have generally the most devoted wives. None of these, I apprehend, would exchange her life of humble, loving ministration, to be ministered unto and tended like a queen by an ordinary man.’

“ ‘They must be poor silly creatures!’ I exclaimed.

“ ‘Nay—they are generally high-minded women.’

“ ‘What! and make themselves slaves of men, in the way you describe?’

“ ‘There is no such thing as *voluntary* slavery, remember. There is nothing slavish

in the devotion of love. To bring the argument home, and end it,' she added, with a smile—'do you think there is anything contemptible — anything poor, silly, or weak-minded, in the love *you* feel for your husband?'

" 'The love I feel for my husband!—Humph!—That is not bringing the argument home to *me*, my dear Miss Hastings. To tell you a secret, there is nothing of *devotion* in it—I leave that to him!—I have no objection to his devoting himself to me;—which, to say the truth, he does rather more than I find quite convenient!'—(And here I smiled a lie, in accordance with the lying words which I meant should sting her into jealousy)—'As for me—why, like the witty Beatrice in the play, "I protest I love him no more than reason." I love him in a reasonable way, as a reasonable man should be loved; not, as you say, women love a man of genius.—Thank Heaven, he is not a genius!'

" 'Is it possible!' she exclaimed, looking at me in amazement.

" 'Is what possible?' I asked. 'That Lord Carleton is not a man of genius?'

" 'That *you* do not know that he is!' she replied, somewhat disdainfully, I fancied.

‘ You are his cousin, to be sure !’ she added in the same tone. ‘ We know the fate of prophets in their own country !’ and she smiled as if she pitied me.—Oh, Bessy ! I felt the Raby blood within me then ; and it prompted my reply.—

“ ‘ Really, Miss Hastings, as a wife, I feel extremely grateful for the high opinion, the evident admiration, the—what shall I call the feeling you are so good as to entertain for Lord Carleton ?—Of course, my affection for him is strong enough to make me pass over the very contemptuous opinion you entertain of my own family. I know not what opportunities of judging you may have had. I am only his wife ; but to me it is quite clear that he has no genius. He is a sensible, clever, good sort of person, admirably fitted for his station—but he has no genius ; or if he has, he has kept it carefully concealed from me. I would almost as soon be married to a madman as to a genius !’

“ Now, I was aware that what I said was calculated to irritate my visitor, and I was rather pleased to see a slight flush come over her pale cheek during the first part of my ill-natured address. I wanted to destroy that calm self-possession which offended my own

pride. I thought I had succeeded, for her eyes flashed once;—but I cannot tell what came over her.—I had no sooner uttered the last words, than she bent her head (we were standing together in my china-room) and kissed my forehead with a long lingering kiss, such as I should have thought her proud lips never gave. In another moment I saw her going out at the door of the room, and glancing back towards me with those wonderful eyes of hers streaming with tears. It was several seconds before I recovered my surprise. Her kiss still warmed my forehead. It stirred my better nature. I darted after her. She was hesitating which way to turn at a corner where two galleries met.

“ ‘ Miss Hastings, Miss Hastings! — Stop one moment.—I—I fear I said something unkind;—something that pained you, just now.’ There I stood,—half afraid, and yet fingering a fold of her shawl, and not daring to look at her eyes lest the tears should be there still.—She is a generous woman, Bessy! There was no proud politeness. She put her arms round me and said,

“ ‘ It is nothing; farewell! God bless you!’

“ ‘ She was going away; I retained her. ‘ Stay

a little longer; I shall think you are still offended if you go.'

" 'I cannot stay!'—she said. 'Good-by! If at any future time you want a friend, will you trust in Margaret Hastings? Will you? Can you?' and her eyes were fixed earnestly on mine.

" 'I can—I will,' said I, firmly. 'But why do you go?'

" 'I cannot stay now.' And she moved away.

" 'At least, I shall see you to-morrow?—I am going to the Rectory,' said I, pursuing her, and taking her hand.

" 'No, no! Better not! Don't come to-morrow. I shall be gone the next day. We part *friends*;' and she pressed my hands—'but friends only in adversity! You wanted to know more of my experience in friendship. I will tell you thus much:—there are some persons who could never be true friends except in the day of trouble. It is thus with you and me. You will not *forget* me, I know. And when sorrow overpowers you, perhaps you will come to me for comfort.' So saying, she passed on, leaving me sad and perplexed.

“ Frederick a man of genius!—She must be blind !

“ Bessy, I cannot divest myself of the idea that there was—that there still may be, love on both sides. Love kept in restraint—hidden, stifled, perhaps believed to be dead within them, but still there.—Alas, alas!—I fancied I was such a happy wife ! Don’t tell me that I am happier than a thousand other wives of my acquaintance!—*Qu’est-ce que cela me fait ?* My card house is tottering.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YOUNG MOTHER AND A REMINISCENCE OF VERSAILLES.

"The canon of the law is laid on him."

King John.

A FORTNIGHT after the date of the last letter the countess writes as follows :

"DEAR BESSY,

"Frederick is at home again. I do not think his visit to London has done him any good. He looks wretchedly ill. He avoids me ; not unkindly—not as if I bored him ;—but as if he did not wish to let me see that he is troubled. Now, this vexes me more than I can explain. There is a certain dignity and reserve about him which always keeps me at a distance when these fits are on him ; and I cannot muster courage to ask for my share of his grief. Men have a great many

things in their minds that their wives never know; and would, I suppose, be the last to know. Still, if Frederick could see into my heart, I think he need have no reserves from me. I wish I had never seen or heard of Miss Hastings! She is frequently in my thoughts now. You will think me foolish if I say that I cannot help connecting Frederick's present unquiet state of mind with her.

"I must not forget to mention a visitor who is here now:—Dr. Ward, an old friend of Frederick's, whom he brought back from London with him. As you have had so much experience among medical men you may perhaps know him. If you do, I congratulate you on knowing a very delightful person. I like him much. He sits with me a great deal in the morning; and as I see he is really fond of children, I do not send mine away. He seems never to tire of them, plays with them, and watches them as if they were his own. Then we have long talks together about the rearing and education of children. I have learned a great deal from him on this subject. As a physician, his advice is very valuable. He has warned me that Arundel will require much care. He says that his mind is already

too active for a healthy child—that his nervous system is too much developed. He says that I must not be tempted to make him an intellectual prodigy. I am glad I was warned of this; for as he is such a clever little thing, it is very likely that I might have stimulated his brain too much. There is no danger of that now, after what Dr. Ward has told me concerning the short and painful lives of precocious children. Arundel is now subjected to frequent cold-water bathing, lives almost wholly in the open air, and is encouraged to run about and to do whatever he can with his arms and legs, and as little as possible with his brain. This is from Dr. Ward's advice. Frederick seems glad that I listen so readily to what he advises. Indeed, I think his visit to Carleton the luckiest thing in the world for me. I was just beginning to feel my own ignorance and inexperience in the management of children. I ought to be grateful for the number of kind friends who are ready to assist me, as a mother. Dr. Ward and Miss Price are quite intimate friends, and are full of each other's praises to me. He says that she is one of the best old ladies to have with children, because

she has no old-lady-like notions about their training. I think Frederick, too, talks to Dr. Ward about the children a good deal;—he has been much occupied with them of late, to my great satisfaction. It would make me miserable if their father took no notice of them.

“I am sorry to say we are to lose Dr. Ward to-morrow. He has been here ten days. He lives at Brompton, near old Mr. Hastings, and knows that family very well. Margaret is his favourite I can see, though he does not say very much about her. I do not wonder that he is fond of her. He says she was the sweetest child he ever saw. Now, the dear old man could never resist a sweet child. Arundel is his darling. He is fond of Frank, too; but I have seen him walk up and down the court-yard for an hour together with little Arundel by his side. I have given orders to Ann to attend implicitly to everything Dr. Ward tells her about the children; and she seems to have conceived an immense reverence for him. I am fortunate in having Ann for a nurse; she is so calm-tempered and sensible; but Dr. Ward advises my having another maid under her—one who is younger,

livelier, and can sing sweetly. He seems to think that children should not be much with grave, dull, quiet people. I believe I shall belong to that respectable class before long. I have already begun *to think*; which is the first step towards dulness, you know."

* * * * *

Some months afterwards I find the following passage in one of Lady Carleton's letters :

" You ask how the children are. We have been very uneasy about Arundel lately. He has had a sort of convulsive fit. I happened to go into the nursery just as he was recovering; or I believe they would have told me nothing about it. I was frightened enough, you may be sure, to see Frederick holding the poor little sufferer down in a steaming hot-bath, while Miss Price and Ann stood by with faces as white as this paper. I sprang forward and seized Frederick's arm quite fiercely — 'In God's name what are you doing to the child?' I gasped out. He shook off my hold as gently as he could, that he might free his arms, for the child was in strong convulsions, and it was necessary to keep his little head above water, while the rest of the body was immersed. I did not see or understand

that, I only felt that I was shaken off;—that something was being done to my child, and I (his mother) knew not what. I looked at Frederick like a fiend; I am sure I did. (He says, ‘No; only like an enraged woman!’) As soon as I saw his face I became calm; it was so full of pain, I never saw any expression like it. It must have been very extraordinary to arrest my attention at such a moment. I trembled, and then burst into tears, exclaiming, ‘Tell me! oh! tell me, what is the matter? What has happened to my darling?’ I could see that he was recovering now; his sweet eyes opened once and looked at me. Frederick spoke very kindly, though his voice was broken. He told me ‘there was nothing very alarming. Arundel had been seized with a convulsive fit.’ He reminded me that Dr. Ward had told us delicate, nervous children were liable to attacks of this kind.

“ ‘But why was I not sent for?’ I asked, reproachfully. ‘Ann, why did you not come for me?—Miss Price, you should have sent for me!’ I said, angrily.

“ Frederick replied, at once, that he had forbidden them. ‘Indeed, there was no time,’ said he. ‘The child was with me when he

was taken ill. I happened to remember what Dr. Ward prescribed in such an emergency, and to lose no time brought him here myself, and took off his clothes while Ann and Miss Price prepared the bath. There was no time to send for you. And see, my love! I have done your duty, even better than you would have done it yourself, for it required considerable strength to hold him down. You must not be angry with any of us;—we have all been doing what is best for the poor little patient. There! now he is much better!’

“Frederick lifted my sweet pet from the bath, and laid him on my lap; and then knelt down beside me, and helped me to rub his beautiful limbs till they were rosy. I never loved Frederick so much as I did then. When the dear little angel smiled again, and uttered his pretty ‘*mam-ma!*’ I almost devoured him with kisses as he lay in naked loveliness on my lap. While my face was buried in his sweet flesh, I felt one of my hands pressed to Frederick’s lips—hot tears fell on it. I looked at him; our faces were on a level, for he was still kneeling, and our eyes met.

“‘You are happy now?’ he asked.

“ ‘ Ah, yes!’ I said. ‘ But what is it that affects *you* so much?’ ”

“ ‘ Nothing, my love! only I am glad to see you smile again. See! how he watches you’—and he turned my attention to the child again.—I thought of nothing else all the rest of the day.

“ In the middle of the night, as I lay awake, Frederick’s face seemed to pass before me in the darkness, wearing the agonised expression I had observed that day in the nursery. In the morning, when I rose, it recurred again to my mind. When he was reading the paper at breakfast-time I scanned his countenance, and was shocked to see how very different it is from what it used to be. When we live constantly with people we do not see the changes in them, I know; but still it is strange that Frederick should have altered so very much within,—let me see,—six or seven months. It cannot be longer ago than that since I was looking at him with a half-critical eye one day, and thinking that he was remarkably handsome. Now, as the light shone full on his head, I saw that his hair is actually beginning to turn grey here

and there; that his cheeks are pale, and his eyes hollow and worn. He really looks very ill. I cannot think how it is that I never observed it before. I questioned him at the time, but could not get him to say there was anything the matter."

* * * * *

For more than two years I find nothing necessary to quote from the countess's letters—they are less frequent than formerly, and contain little but details of her domestic life and notifications of the growing beauty and intelligence of her two boys. The "little brown-eyed godchild," Margaret Hastings, is also spoken of as the "sweetest, *funniest*, most lively child"—and the "favourite play-thing" of Frank and Arundel. At the end of that period Arundel has "another of those fits." He is ill for several weeks—after which his mother writes as follows:

"Arundel is playing about as usual again. He looks very pretty at this moment. He has climbed on to the music-stool, and is amusing himself with my new pianoforte. He is not drumming away with both fists, and delighting in the crashing discords, like any other child. He strikes a single note

distinctly with one hand, and then seeks with the other for a note that harmonises with it. When he has found it, he smiles to himself in the prettiest way you can conceive. He will sit there by the hour together. Whenever he produces a succession of harmonies that please him very much, he turns round to me with a beaming, eager face, and asks, '*Mam-ma love at mugik?*' I assure him that I *do* love that music; and having met with the sympathy he requires, he will go on finding out thirds and harmonious combinations. This morning he made a little melody, and was very happy; but afterwards he began to cry, because, as he said, 'it would not come again!'

"He seems to like putting his little ear close to the pianoforte, when I am playing difficult instrumental pieces, better than any other amusement. He would listen to the sonatas of Mozart and Haydn for a much longer time than I could go on playing them. When he sees me go to the instrument, he immediately throws down the plaything he happens to have in his hands at the time, and begins pushing a chair along the floor. When this chair is in contact with a certain part of

the pianoforte, he scrambles on to the seat with great activity, and lays his head against the instrument. I wish you could see him at these times, Bessy! It would be the drollest thing in the world if it were not the most beautiful! His baby face assumes the *pleased*, but grave look of a connoisseur, who knows not what he is going to hear; but who expects to be delighted. By the time I have selected the music and am seated, he has settled himself as I have described. We glance at each other; I dare not do more; because Dr. Ward says we must do nothing to stimulate his love of music. The doctor does not object to my playing in his hearing, or to his amusing himself at the instrument; only we are to *teach* him nothing, and not to praise, or encourage his infant efforts too much. He says it might do him harm to suppress the natural tendency altogether; but that it would assuredly be ultimately injurious to his constitution, mental and physical, if I were to follow my inclination and begin to teach him music now.

“In the course of my practising, I glance often at my little auditor; and sometimes I can scarcely go on for love and wonder. To

see that tiny hand marking the rhythm so exactly, and when I stumble, holding itself in suspense till we get right again. His little frame seems to vibrate with the sounds. During the soft, slow movements, especially where the melody is clear and rich, the child's face becomes really 'as the face of an angel.' Don't think I quote Scripture profanely, Bessy. No other words will express the truth. Does not some poet speak of the music breathing from a face? If no poet *has* spoken of such a thing, I can only say that some poet ought to speak of it directly. If you know any of the tuneful tribe who would be thankful for an idea, you may make him a present of this, with my best wishes. I can spare *this* idea, you know—(though I '*do seem totally devoid of any ideas not picked up in the nursery*')—because I have got the thing itself in my musical child. By the way, I dare say you are right about the dreadful dearth of 'ideas' in my letters now. Poor Bessy! It is hard for you to lie on that everlasting sofa—an everlasting invalid—with an everlasting craving for amusement, chiefly derivable from family letters; and then to find your former indefatigable correspondent growing remiss

and stupid. I will try and amend, indeed I will. But if you only knew how pleasant it is to have *no* ideas!—Don't be shocked.

“Ah! Bessy! I scarcely ever have *ideas* now that I would not willingly get rid of, so that they pass into no other mind. ‘*A bas les idées!*’ say I.—Depend upon it, Bessy, it is *les idées* that brought about this terrible French revolution, which seems to come like the crack of doom upon you and all the rest of the world; and the reports of which, like the sounds of distant thunder, come rolling round my quiet home.

“That beautiful queen! How well I remember her face and manner! There never was anything in all this world so charming! I saw her four times in public, and three times in private. Once *we* (*she* and I, that is, *alone*) talked for three-quarters of an hour; and, setting aside the graciousness of the queen, the difference of rank, &c., I never in all my life talked to a woman I admired so much and loved so soon; for I *did* love her. It was impossible to help loving her, even in that short space of time. She was all loveliness. But you will say you have heard me extemporise and extravagise on this theme

fifty thousand times ; that it is one of my mad-
nesses.—But I will tell you a little thing
which, woman as I am, and vain as all men
have discovered *women* to be, I never told to
any one before. It is a trifle ; but it helped
to bind up the love of Queen Marie Antoinette
inseparably with my own vanity—‘*et j’y*
tiens,’ as the poor French people say, or used
to say before this revolution—which seems to
have changed everything.

“One evening, when we were in Paris, just
after our marriage, Frederick and I were at a
ball in the Tuileries. As an Englishwoman
and a bride I attracted some attention there.
It is pleasant to be admired in good French
society ; pleasanter than it is elsewhere ;—at
least, I found it so. The buzz of admiration
was very charming to me then, I remember.
There were some people with me whom I
liked ; and I talked gaily, and was happy.
Presently I heard some one say : ‘*Comme elle*
ressemble à la reine, ma jolie compatriote ! C’est
absolument Marie Antoinette en miniature !’
This was said of *me*, I knew ; and I knew the
voice also. It was an Englishman’s. I blushed
with gratified pride ; for it was Mr. Fox who
had spoken ! Then came a voice in reply,

deep, sonorous, grand—even when uttering such a trifle: ‘*Mais, oui; elle ressemble beaucoup à la reine!—Cependant elle est plus Marie Antoinette que sa majesté elle-même. C’est la reine, moins la royauté!*’—The voice attracted my attention, and when I caught sight of this speaker, I was divided between aversion and admiration. I had never seen him before. He was not known to many persons about the court; M. de Calonne had brought him there that evening, I heard. I saw some few people who whispered and shook their heads when they spoke of him; he, towering above them, and smiling a keen sort of satire, looked about fearlessly, with the finest eyes set in the ugliest face you can conceive. Presently I saw Frederick talking to him; they seemed to know each other well; they had met in London. When I asked him the name of his extraordinary-looking friend, he said it was *M. de Mirabeau!* People about the French court knew him better afterwards!”

* * * * *

CHAPTER IX.

FRANÇOIS DE MERVILLE.

"And of his cheer he seemed full solemn sad."

SPENSER.

SOME weeks after the last letter, the countess wrote as follows :

"We shall be going to London soon ; for many of our former Paris friends are there, driven out of their own country by this awful political convulsion, and we should like to be of service to them, if we can. I have been thinking lately that such a change *might* take place in England. I have dreamed once or twice that this place was being attacked by the mob, that Frederick and I escaped in disguise, and that we carried the two boys in our arms as far as a large building near P—— (the Lunatic Asylum), and where we were

only able to save ourselves by feigning madness. There is no end to the horrors which the details of this revolution excite in the mind. Frederick is unable to think or talk of anything else just now. I believe this excitement does him good. He looks better, in spite of his violent indignation against the Jacobins."

* * * * *

For some time after this, the countess's letters are dated from London, and are interspersed with allusions to, and observations on, the Great Event of her day. Her husband seems to have made himself a sort of emigrant's friend—giving time, money, and thought to the relief of the unfortunate French exiles who were crowding into London at that period. He does not seem to have confined his sympathies to those of his own rank, for the countess speaks to her sister of the numbers of "*ouvriers*," "*hommes de lettres*," "*artistes*," "*simples paysans*," &c., who flock to their house in St. James's-square to see the earl. He gives his time from ten until two, every day, to this business. She intimates, also, that he enlists her in his service among the women.

Then come long letters full of the distresses of the French women in London. The warm-hearted countess can "scarcely eat her dinner for thinking of the many poor *émigrés* who have no dinner to eat." The anecdotes she tells of the suffering and generous self-devotion of the French families in which she interests herself, are very touching. I have learned, principally from François, that nothing could exceed the feeling of enthusiastic gratitude with which the Earl and Countess of Carleton were regarded by the French, of all ranks, in London at that time. I find the first mention of François himself in one of the countess's letters during the following year.

"I have never yet mentioned the De Mervilles. That is a sad story. They come from Picardy, and are a younger branch of a good family. I do not know how Frederick became acquainted with them first; but I suspect his father, the *wicked lord*, practised some of his wickedness upon them; seduced the daughter by a promise of marriage, or something of that kind, which I think it better for all parties not to inquire minutely about. Then, when Frederick knew of this, after his father's

death, he was anxious to make any reparation in his power (I do not *know*, remember ; but I am almost sure it *was* so). He went to Amiens, where the De Mervilles lived (this was long before our marriage), and seems to have won their profound esteem and gratitude. I never heard him speak of them till about a month ago, when he told me that they had arrived in London, and that they were persons in whose fate he took a special interest. Their story is very sad. There is an old father, almost helpless from imbecility ; a daughter, about thirty, who is insane ; and a son, François, a young man of twenty. François' conduct is exemplary. He wished to become a priest, and studied at St. Omer's for some years. About two years ago his mother died, and his father and sister were left without any one to take charge of them. Frederick offered to pay amply for proper attendance on the two invalids. When he told me this, he added that 'it was no more than his duty to do *that*, since poor Madeleine's illness was the consequence of the late earl's unprincipled conduct.' However, it seems that the pride, or the delicacy, or the filial piety of François forbade his acceptance of my lord's offer. He deter-

mined to give up his profession and his hopes of advancement in life, and devote himself to his father and sister as long as they lived. He was known to hold loyal opinions; and during an outbreak of the revolutionary party at Amiens their small house was burned. Poor François had great difficulty in getting his father and sister out of the flames. Afterwards, he had no means of supporting them, for their little all was destroyed, with the exception of a small pension which Frederick had, some years before, settled on Madeleine. François wrote to ask his advice. Frederick, with his usual benevolence, wrote to François de Merville immediately, advising him to bring the poor old man and Madeleine to London, and offering him a good salary as his own secretary and general agent among the French emigrants here.—Not before he wanted such assistance, let me tell you, Bessy;—he has business enough among them to employ two or three secretaries. When François entered upon his work here, I was disposed to view him with favourable eyes, for he took a weight of French correspondence off my hands; but I soon began to like the young man for his own sake. He is very

unlike any *young* French animal I ever saw : is calm, grave, and incapable of gaiety. The only relaxation he gives himself, in this house, is playing with Frank and Arundel ;—he is fond of children, and the boys are becoming much attached to him. At home, poor fellow, he can but have little pleasure. I have been with Frederick to their lodging at Chelsea. It was a melancholy thing to see the childish old man—once a sculptor of great merit, Frederick says—and the imbecile daughter ; the latter, as inert and helpless as the former, and with a far more painful expression in her handsome face. She heeds no one but François, whose never-failing kindness and tenderness seem to have made some impression on her. When he comes into the room, she looks up and smiles ;—when he speaks to her, she looks eagerly into his face as if she were straining every fibre of her poor brain to understand what he says ; and then murmurs rapidly—‘ *Ah ! c’est ça ! —Bien, bien ! mon petit François !* ’ or ‘ *Mais, oui, sans doute ! tu as raison, mon frère.* ’ She rarely makes any other reply. I was surprised to find her dressed with scrupulous

neatness, her fine hair arranged with great taste, and her gown fitting to admiration. She was seated by the open window of their little parlour, busily engaged in the manufacture of a head-dress of ribbon. When I watched the hands only, without looking at the face, I saw she was a clever milliner;—it is always a great pleasure to me to see hands moving dexterously at any sort of work. It struck me that she might be made to earn money, while she amused herself, and on our way home I proposed to Frederick that I should send her some millinery to do for me. He smiled sadly, and replied, that whatever I might send, and however clearly François might try to make her understand that the materials were to be made after this or that pattern, and for another person, poor Madeleine would appropriate them to herself. He told me that vanity and the love of dress,—feelings which had led to the loss of her reason,—still remained in full activity. In the worst stages of her illness she had never neglected her personal appearance; he had never seen her otherwise than *bien mise*. She devoted her whole time to dressing herself,

sitting at the window to be admired, and altering her clothes to the newest fashion she saw in the streets.

“I could not help saying that I believed ‘many thousand women, said to be in their right mind, occupy themselves no better.’ Indeed, Bessy, it is a surprising and a melancholy thing to see how much time women spend exactly as poor Madeleine does! I cannot help wishing that our sex had some encouragement from the other to waste less time and thought in the mere adornment of the person. I know fifty women who have received what is called moral and mental culture, whose chief thought is *dress*—dress buying, cheapening, changing, making, altering, wearing, arranging, preserving, showing,—who, when they have spent more than two hours in the elaboration of a successful toilette, walk forth from their dressing-room with no other thought in their heads than how to make this successful toilette most envied and admired; and having gratified their vanity, they retire at night with the sense of having done *their best* that day. ‘How!’ you will say; ‘Caroline, who used

to pique herself on taste in dress, who spent plenty of money and no little time in that fascinating occupation! She to talk thus! 'Yes, Bessy; and my talking is worth more on such a subject than if I did not know by experience the pleasures of dress. I would have women show taste in dress, and give a certain amount of attention to the subject; but to have no real thought or feeling for anything else is monomania. I consider poor Madeleine's insanity but a few degrees stronger than that of Miss S——, who is always buying and altering dresses;—and who sees nothing in any assembly but the new fashions and materials. When her brother died the other day, she had no time to grieve, because 'there was all her mourning to be selected,' and 'it was,' she said, 'a very troublesome business. She hardly knew what was proper to wear for a brother—whether two tucks of crape or three,' &c. 'However, it was a mercy she was *obliged* to think of these things, because it took her thoughts from the sad event!' &c. Now, though there may be more method in her madness than in poor Madeleine's, there is quite as much madness in her method;

and, as circumstances have turned out for my poor imbecile protégée, much less usefulness. François and I, together, have got Madeleine to employ herself so that she *earns* money. She makes caps, collars, ruffles, ribbon-knots, &c., for me. It is true she does it with the firm persuasion that they are for herself—to be worn on some grand holiday occasions. She makes them with intense zeal and great taste; she puts them by carefully in a large box, and forgets that she ever made them as soon as my maid supplies her with fresh materials. She finds the box empty when she goes to put the new articles away, and makes no inquiry concerning those that have been carried off. As she is always happy and cheerful while her fingers are employed in this way, her brother's life is made much easier than formerly, when he was frequently engaged in trying to rouse her from melancholy inaction. The woman of the house where they lodge is very kind to her and her father ; she prepares their meals, and takes charge of them while François is at our house, which is from ten till five, every day. Old De Merville must have been very handsome. He still shows a

love of the art to which he devoted his early life ; for he is always carving pieces of marble or common stone into the form of vine leaves and bunches of grapes. It seems that he will execute no other designs. His grapes and vine-leaves *in rilievo* are wonderfully beautiful ; but I wish he would do something else. This love of the grape looks suspicious."

CHAPTER X.

LITTLE MAGGIE HASTINGS.

"A little child! a limber elf!"

COLERIDGE.

ARUNDEL RABY was attacked by a severe illness a short time before the completion of his seventh year. The family was then at Carleton Castle. I have gathered many particulars concerning the state of matters at that time from the correspondence of my grandfather, the Rector, with his sister, Margaret. Dr. Ward was in attendance on the child for more than a week. The disorder was cerebral, and was attended with acute pain.

"MY DEAR SISTER,

"Dr. Ward walked down this morning to tell us that the child was rather better. Our young ones were gladdened by the news.

Little Maggie immediately asked if she might go and see him. Her inquiry was so solemn and earnest, that we could not help smiling. The doctor patted her on the head, and said, 'Yes, my dear, very soon;' upon which she ran away (as we thought) to play. About two hours later, after the doctor had gone, and I was quietly seated in my study, Sophia came in, in some excitement, asking, 'Do *you* know anything of Maggie? she is nowhere to be found!' Seeing her uneasiness, I took up my hat and searched the garden, stable, and out-houses in vain. The servants and the other children were seeking, high and low, in the house, with a like result. After laughing at my wife's fears, I began to share them. As she is given to odd ways, delighting in doing what no other child of her age and sex would think of, I looked up into trees, and on the angles of the walls. As I returned through the village, after a search, I met young Green, the keeper's son, and asked him if he had 'seen one of my children anywhere on the road.'

"He replied, that he had seen 'the little Missy with the brown eyes, away up in the park!'

“ ‘ In the park ! ’ I exclaimed, ‘ what was she doing there ? ’

“ ‘ She was just toddling along, straight to the castle, sir,’ he replied. ‘ I stared a bit to see such a little creature out by herself you may be sure ; and I went up to her and asked where she was going. She looked at me for all the world like a brave little woman, with those *oncommon* eyes of hers, and she says quite demure : “ *I’m going to a castle to see a little Dunny.* ” ’

“ ‘ God bless me ! ’ I exclaimed, ‘ I hope you did not leave her, Green. She is much too young to go out by herself.’

“ ‘ Well, sir,’ said the man, ‘ so *I* thought, and was for bringing her back ; but *that* did not seem to suit her, at any price. She’s got a will of her own, sir, that’s clear ; and a way of getting it, too, young as she is ! The long and the short of the business is, that the little lady made me carry her up to the castle, instead of bringing her home. She prattled so pretty all the way about *little Dunny*, as she calls poor little Master Arundel, that I was quite sorry to part with her, as I did, when I met the nursemaid walking with the young viscount. As soon as *he* saw little

Missy, there was a grand shout on both sides, and I delivered Missy to Ann. Ann began to scold, but Missy persisted that *a doctor said a might come and see Dunny*; and then she began to cry,—pretty innocent! and said she *must—indeed, she must, see ittle Dunny—she loved him so, and was so sorry*. To pacify her, Ann made up her mind to take the child home to dine with them, and I promised to call at your house, sir, and tell them what had become of the young lady. I was just going there now.'

"I thanked the kind young man, and returned home with the news. In the afternoon I went off after the runaway, musing a little upon Sophia's last words—'She is little more than five years old, and already gives more trouble than all the rest of the children put together!' Poor little Maggie! I'm afraid she is gifted with an inconvenient and unlady-like amount of self-will and originality.

"On the present occasion it was difficult to scold, because, as it happened, her impromptu visit turned out a very opportune one.

"It seems that Dr. Ward had this morning

observed symptoms of returning reason in the child ; and was anxiously watching for their increase. It was during a critical sleep that the doctor walked down here. On his return he found his little patient still sleeping soundly, as he expected. He was prepared for the length and soundness of the sleep, but he was very uneasy about its result. He was by no means sure that the poor boy would not wake up a confirmed idiot.—He told me afterwards somewhat of his feelings, as he sat beside the bed, about the time he expected the sleep to pass off. He could scarcely bear to glance at the faces of the parents—the mother's wearing that indescribable look, made up of the intensest love and pity, mingled with painful, eager inquiry, which, he says, he sees so often in the faces of mothers as they watch the death-beds of their children ; the father's face, downcast, wretched, but too proud to unbend the firm-set mouth,—or to let the lids droop over the expectant eye.

“Poor Carleton ! Dr. Ward observed, also, that he did not stand beside his wife, or offer her any consolation, and that she seemed to avoid looking at him ; their whole souls

seemed concentrated in the gaze with which they watched the little slumberer, who lay, wasted, wan, with the transparent lids only half covering his large eyes—the beautiful head, shorn of its abundant curls, resting on one small thin hand, while the other lay, clasped in his mother's, on the white coverlet. He had been thus for five hours. At length he stirred slightly—a tremor passed through his limbs. They who saw the motion trembled too. Then his eyes opened a little. And the thought came to all of them—‘What if there be no longer any intelligence there?’ At that moment there was a sound of small pattering feet, and a child's voice outside the room sounding plaintively, and as if in the act of struggling.

“ ‘*Oh ! let I do in ! I will be dood ! Please let I do see ittle Dunny !*’ ”

“ For half an instant a feeling of alarm at this disturbance, so near the silent chamber, contracts the brows of the watchers ; but only for half an instant—the next it is converted into tearful joy. For at the sound of that voice the patient's eyes open wide ; he raises his head, smiles, looks towards the

door and then towards his mother, and says, in feeble, but glad accents: ' Little Maggie ! Mamma, little Maggie ! '

" The doctor says that he never admitted a visitor into a sick-room more willingly than he then admitted our little pet. At a sign from him, Carleton opened the bedroom door, and discovered Miss Maggie engaged in single combat with Ann, who was endeavouring to carry off the child. In another moment Maggie was free, and saw the door open before her. Without pausing, she ran into the sick-chamber, and Frank crept in after her. Dr. Ward says it was pretty to see her stop suddenly, smitten by the silence and darkness of the room, and then turn her head round slowly, in the gloom, as if in search of something. At last she seemed to make out the bed, and began to move towards it. When she was close to it, so that she could see its little tenant looking eagerly at her, she stretched out her arms towards him, and sobbed out '*Poor Dunny ! Kiss ittle Maggie !*' The invalid testifying much impatience to comply with her request, she was lifted on the bed by Dr. Ward. He says that every

one present shed tears at the sight of their innocent caresses. Arundel's pale face beamed with delight, while Maggie's fingers wandered over it, as if to make sure it was indeed her 'dear Dunny.' She seemed sadly puzzled about his *hair*—her eyes fixed themselves insatiably upon it in the dim light. And then feeling with her two little hands all over his head, she said, mournfully, '*A carl's gone!*' Being told by Lady Carleton that she must sit quite still, and not talk, she immediately seated herself on the bed, so that she and her little friend could look at each other; and remained immovable. Frank came and stood beside her, looking with awe-struck face at his brother, whom he had not seen for many days. Arundel put up his pale thin lips to kiss him, but poor Frank burst into tears, and hid his face in Maggie's frock. He is very fond of Arundel, and has been inconsolable during his illness. *He* is old enough to see the sad change in 'Dunny,' as they call him. He is a fine, noble little fellow. Dr. Ward would not suffer the two children to be removed until the patient seemed exhausted and inclined to sleep once more.

“Her mother says Maggie ought to have been a boy. That she is as bold as a red-breast; that she never seems to be afraid of anything. Not a bad quality for a woman, *that*. Fear is the mother of weakness; and weakness and wickedness are twins. If Maggie grows up a *brave* woman, I’ll forgive her for running away from home in her sixth year.

“*Thursday*.—Arundel is slowly but surely recovering. Dr. Ward left the castle for London to-day. On his way to P—— he stopped here; and we had an hour’s conversation. It has set me thinking on many things. He begs me to give as much time to Carleton as I can—says he wants rousing—should exert himself. There was no need to put in words what each knew the other feared. Dr. Ward seems to have little interest in persons and things unconnected with his great subject, Insanity. He says all the world, and physicians themselves, have been entirely in error as to the nature, causes, and means of cure of this terrible disease. He says that light is only now breaking clearly upon him. As to the fact that insanity, like every other disease (and he maintains that it *is* like every

other disease, a physical ailment, chiefly) is hereditary, he has no doubt; but under what conditions he cannot ascertain. Lady Carleton's health is injured by her assiduous attention to the child; but there is a deeper cause for the great change which has taken place in her. From questions she put to the doctor, he fears she has some idea that Arundel's illness is *inherited*. He was able to prophesy good to her for his *boyhood*; at least, for many years to come. He says there is every reason to hope, that, having passed this critical period safely, he will become strong, physically and mentally. He assured her of this. He did not tell her what he has told me and Carleton; viz., that in seven more years, *i.e.* about his fifteenth year, it is not unlikely the dear boy will suffer another obscuration of the intellect; and that that attack will be longer and probably more dangerous than the one from which he has just recovered. I asked the doctor *why* he had not warned Lady Carleton of this; and the gentle goodness and wisdom of his reply satisfied me on that score.

“No warning could ward off the attack, I

believe. When I find the evil creeping on, as it *will*, by slow and scarcely perceptible steps, she shall be warned. In the mean time, if he should fall a victim to one of the thousand accidents which carry children to the grave, it will be well to have spared her the terrible prospect of that evil which he did not live to meet. We physicians are but too glad to save hearts from suffering when we can. For poor Lady Carleton, as for most of us, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." You non-medical folks accuse us of playing the devil with our patients; now, I like to vary the form of the accusation; and so it is reported that I love to "*play Providence*" with mine,' added the good old man, with a smile. He then asked to see all our children, that he might ascertain if there were any ailment he could prescribe for, among us. We could not muster one! I confess I looked with some pride upon our seven healthy children, who had nothing the matter with them. I thought the doctor, too, looked with satisfaction at the group, as he said—'It will be your own fault, youngsters, if you ever have much to do with doctors!' Of Maggie he

took a special farewell. He seemed pleased with her, and prophesied that 'if she took great pains she might grow up *almost* as good as her aunt.'—I hope her aunt feels flattered."

END OF VOL. I.





